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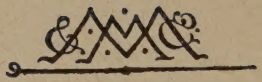
# THE OLD TESTAMENT



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# THE OLD TESTAMENT

## ITS MEANING AND VALUE FOR THE CHURCH TO-DAY

BY

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VICAR OF S. MICHAEL'S, HEADINGLEY
EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF NORWICH
SOMETIME PRINCIPAL OF LEEDS CLERGY SCHOOL
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TO

MY *VALIANT* SHIPMATES

# PREFACE

THE following pages were written on board one of H.M. Ships at sea, though they received their final revision in the security of a Shore Establishment.

They have grown out of a course of sermons preached at sea between Easter and Christmas 1917.

That course deepened a conviction which I have entertained for several years, that there is no more fruitful line of work open to Christian teachers at this moment than exposition of the Bible. People are always ready to learn about the Bible and its meaning, and wish to be assured that its authority is unimpaired.

Renan is credited with having said: "In France we had seven Sacraments—and we lost them all. In England you have never had more than two—the Bible and Sunday. But you have kept them both."

There is at least an element of truth in that remark.

I have no title to be considered expert in Old Testament studies. I know very little Hebrew, and can only lay claim to such knowledge as must necessarily be acquired by any one who has had for several years to include courses of lectures upon portions of the Old Testament amongst his regular duties.

To many Old Testament scholars some of the opinions which I have expressed will appear unduly

conservative, and I may seem to be guilty of presumption in having ventured to write upon this subject.

But while writing I have not had scholars or experts of any kind in view. My object has been to shew what the value of the Old Testament may be to the ordinary reader, by trying to shew what it meant to the men who wrote it. Accordingly I have avoided as far as possible saying anything which could not be perceived by study of the English version. I have tried to make no statement which the ordinary reader of the Bible in English cannot test for himself. It has not, however, always proved possible to keep within such narrow limits.

The Christian position is assumed throughout. I have not concerned myself with those who doubt or deny the existence of God, nor with Theists who dislike the Christian moral code.

I have had in view only those who believe, as I do, that the Old Testament points to the New, and that the Figure drawn in the Gospel is a historically accurate portrait, against or beyond Whom there can never be any question of appeal.

My motive in writing has been the conviction that much in the Old Testament is a matter of perplexity to many Christian people, and that anything which helps to resolve any of these perplexities strengthens our hold upon the salvation which Our Lord has won for us.

The attitude of the Church of England towards the Bible has never been expressed better than in the Coronation Service. When the Bishop of London presents the Sovereign with a copy of the Scriptures

the act is accompanied with these words—*Our gracious King we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing which this world affords. Here is Wisdom, this is the Royal Law, these are the Living Oracles of God.*

Every word which I have written has been prompted by the belief that this tribute is not an exaggeration, and by the hope of making it easier for modern readers to pay it on their own behalf.

I am indebted to my wife for much valuable assistance in the work of revision.

SCRIPTORI · LECTORIBUS ·
PROPITIETUR ·
AUCTOR.

R. H. M.

*P.S.*—The publication of this book has been delayed for nearly a year by lack of paper upon which to print it.—R. H. M.

HEADINGLEY. CHRISTMAS, 1918.

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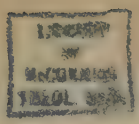

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY

THE last two generations have witnessed a very far-reaching change in our attitude towards the Old Testament. But while this fact is a matter of common knowledge, there are many people who would find it difficult to say what the outcome of the change has been. Certain bygone controversies have given rise to a vague impression that *Science has proved the Bible to be untrue*, and the Clergy are often regarded as trying to defend a position which everybody else knows to be untenable. Some of them, it is implied, do so merely because their livelihood depends upon it. Others may be honest but are exceptionally ill-informed.

The literature dealing with the Old Testament is now very extensive. Without going outside our own country, we can find admirable works bearing upon any part of it which we may wish to study. But most of these are of no service to the ordinary church-goer. They are written by experts for students, and demand more time and knowledge than the ordinary reader can be expected to give to them. It is difficult for the ordinary church-goer to gain any clear idea as to how he is expected to

regard the Old Testament. And the longer the difficulty persists the more likely he is to end by concluding that the Old Testament has no longer any serious claim upon his attention.

The following pages do not profess to be a complete survey of the results of Old Testament studies. They are merely an attempt to give a general point of view, in the hope of making it a little easier for the ordinary church-goer to hear and to read the Old Testament with profit. They will not go into details more than seems to be absolutely necessary, and all technicalities will be avoided as far as possible.

The Church of England lays great stress upon the study of the Bible, because we have realized that personal religion is very largely dependent upon it. We have introduced a large amount of Scripture into our public worship, and have encouraged people to read the Bible in private. Our efforts have been so far successful that the words of the Bible are better known in our country than anywhere else. But it must be admitted that we have not always read it intelligently, and religion has suffered in consequence.

We have been accustomed to bring to our reading of the Old Testament certain traditional presuppositions. These have all been prompted by genuine reverence for the sacred text. But they are the outcome of religious feeling only, and do not rest upon any solid foundation. And they have sometimes led us to arbitrary conclusions which cannot be defended.

1. When we call the Bible *The Word of God* we are using language which we do not apply to any other

books. If we call other writings *inspired* (as we may) we attach a somewhat different meaning to the word. All Christians are agreed that the Bible is inspired as nothing else is, and that it is the only written *Word of God* which exists.

We can therefore have no preconceived idea as to what sort of thing the *Word of God* is likely to be, nor how it is likely to have been imparted to men. Experience gained in other fields cannot help us here. Our whole conception of what *Inspiration* means must be derived from the Bible itself. There is no other possible source.

We must not settle in our own minds what inspired writings ought to be, and then try to make the Bible conform to the standard which we have set up. It is only by study of the Bible itself, its history and contents alike, that we can hope to discover how God has been pleased to reveal Himself to men, and what His revelation is intended to teach them. It is at least possible that His methods will prove to have been different from what we had expected.

2. If we assert that the *Word of God* can only deal with facts, that is merely an assumption which study of the Bible may establish or disprove. But it is to be noted that human teachers habitually use many things besides facts wherewith to impart their lessons. They can avail themselves of poetry, of allegory, and of fiction if they think fit. And we must therefore hesitate before limiting the teaching activity of the Holy Spirit to a field narrower than our own. We cannot presume to restrict Him to facts unless He has made it perfectly clear that He has been pleased so to restrict Himself.

Whether He has been pleased to do so or not can only be settled by careful examination of the contents of the Bible. But when beginning the examination we can have no opinion one way or the other. If we like to make an assumption in favour of facts only, we can. But it is only an assumption, and religion does not depend upon its validity.

3. It is a misuse of language to describe the Bible as *A Divine Revelation*. No document could be that, unless perhaps it had been written by the actual finger of God Himself. The only sphere in which God can reveal Himself to us now is in our spiritual consciousness. Nothing else is capable of receiving any message from Him.

The individual who is conscious of having received a message from God naturally wishes to impart it to others. But before he can do so he must put it into human speech. He is reduced to the use of language, which is a human invention. And no language can ever be a perfect medium of expression. It is the best medium which we possess, but any words which we can find must be less than the thoughts which they clothe. They may be compared with our bodies. Our bodies are the medium through which we express ourselves to other people, but they are not to be identified with the spirits which inspire them; nor can they at present express those spirits perfectly.

The Bible is to be regarded as the *Record* of a Revelation rather than as the Revelation itself. In the eyes of all Christians it is of pre-eminent value because it is the only Record of a unique Revelation. But the Record has been made and transmitted to us by human agency. The Prophet who is inspired

by God must express what has been revealed to him, as well as he can, in the language and ideas of his own day. Until he has cast the Divine Message, which has flowed into his soul, into a mould of his own making, he cannot communicate it to anybody else. Moreover, when we are dealing with the Record of a Revelation made more than two thousand years ago, it is to be remembered that the documents upon which we depend have passed through many hands. They have been copied and edited again and again. And we have no warrant for assuming that the copyists and editors of inspired writings were inspired themselves. We do not think that the printers who print copies of the Bible are inspired now. Just as misprints are possible to-day, the ancient manuscripts upon which we rely may be found to contain mistakes.

It has been widely held that *Inspiration* means Infallibility down to the minutest detail guaranteed by God Himself. It has often been argued that if we call writings *Inspired* we must mean that they contain no mistakes of any kind. If we admit the possibility of error, we are denying their *Inspiration*—or at least endeavouring to pare it away.

But this again is only an assumption. Of ourselves we are not in a position to have any opinion upon the point. *Inspiration* might prove to mean that—or it might prove to mean something very different. We can only decide by examination of the Bible itself, because it is our only standard.

We can, however, see for ourselves that the idea that *Inspiration* removes all possibility of error, either upon the part of the original author, or of

the scribes who have copied his words at later periods, presents very serious difficulties. It means that the writer is merely a pen in the Hand of the Holy Spirit, so that no responsibility whatever can attach to him for what he writes. He has no power of will, and is therefore beyond praise or blame.

But we believe that the power of choosing between different courses, and the responsibility which it involves, is an inalienable prerogative of our nature. It is the possession of this power which makes us human beings, and not machines. It puts us above the forces of nature—the wind, the fire and the earthquake, which, though they can sweep us out of existence in a moment, are blind. They do not know what they are doing. They cannot choose their own course, and therefore we are greater than they. The Bible itself is clear upon the point. If it teaches anything, it teaches that we are always responsible for what we say and do. Otherwise religion could not exist. There is no such thing as *Sin; Right* and *Wrong* are merely phrases, which at best indicate a conventional distinction, if the power of choice is ever taken out of our hands.

If the men who produced the Bible could not make a mistake of any kind, it means that when they were writing they had no power to choose what they would say. If so, they were not men. Their humanity had been destroyed, and for the time being they had been brought down to the level of machines. Their inspiration had made them something less than they were before.

It may be argued that as human nature is stained with sin we must be stripped of our humanity before

God can use us fully for the highest purposes. This seems to be the idea which underlies the ordinary heathen conception of inspiration. In heathen eyes the mark of Divine Inspiration seems always to be a frenzy. The speaker does not know what he is saying, and is in no way responsible for the words which proceed from his mouth. If they were in any sense his, they could not be of supernatural authority.[1]

This view is natural when the possibilities of human nature are imperfectly understood. But a Christian is not compelled to share it. In fact it is difficult to see how he can share it. We believe that God has taken our nature to Himself, and that it is even now enthroned at the very centre of the Spiritual Order. We cannot, therefore, maintain that human nature in the fullness of all its powers is incapable of being the vehicle of God's revelation of Himself. Just in so far as he is stained with sin the individual is an imperfect vehicle. But that does not mean that he is not a real one. If the Incarnation of the Son of God was possible, it cannot be necessary for an inspired writer to cease to be a man.

We should rather expect to find that *Inspiration* means a heightening of all human faculties, so that an inspired man becomes more of a man than he was before. It ought to endow him with deeper insight and finer discrimination. He ought to exhibit more courage than ever before, coupled with a deeper sense of his responsibility for what he says. But none of these things mean that he is incapable of making a mistake. If inspiration degrades a man to the level

[1] The modern "spiritualist" *medium* seems to have reverted to this conception.

of a machine, we can hardly escape from the conclusion that it were better not to be inspired.

As this view amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum*, we could only hold it if it were absolutely forced upon us by the Bible itself. But the more closely we study the Bible the less warrant do we discover for holding anything of the kind.

4. An inspired writer can only express himself in the terms of his own day. But when we read the Old Testament it is easy to forget how far the authors are removed from ourselves. They lived in a different part of the world, more than two thousand years before our time. They belong to a different racial family, with which we have nothing in common. Their habitual modes of thought and expression are utterly unlike our own.

But we do not always make sufficient allowance for this. Because we possess the Scriptures in our own language we are apt to read them as if they had been written by modern Englishmen. If we do so, it means that we read our own ideas into them, instead of drawing from them what God has planted there.

It is to be hoped that our *Authorised Version* will never lose its place as an English classic. It ought to be read. But for purposes of study the *Revised Version* is to be preferred. It is a more accurate translation, and is often easy to understand where the older version is extremely obscure. Also, it shows by a different spacing of the lines whether what we are reading is poetry or prose. The *Authorised Version* ignores the difference, and this has given rise to a good deal of misunderstanding. No poetry

is ever meant to be read as if it were prose. We are intended to interpret it by different standards.

The poetical element in the Old Testament is larger than we sometimes suspect. Some of the books are nothing but poetry, and much of the prose writing is of a poetical character. Orientals do not distinguish between poetry and prose as sharply as we are accustomed to do. In their hands prose slides into poetry very easily. They are more imaginative than we are, and their prose generally contains a considerable admixture of rhetoric. Expressions which may strike us as exaggerated, or as almost absurd, are quite natural in their eyes. We must be prepared to bring a good deal of imagination to the reading of their works.

We all know that the Psalms are poetry, and we treat them as such in our public worship. Yet it is a mistake to treat them as if they were all by one hand. They are a collection of poems by different authors, belonging to very different dates.[1] A fair general description of them would be *Hymns Ancient and Modern of the Jewish Church.*

The Song of Solomon could not well be anything except a poem. But it is less obvious to the English reader that the Book of Job,[2] the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and a large part of the Book of Proverbs are poetry too.

Besides these, there are numerous pieces of poetry inserted into the text of prose books, *e.g.* The Blessing of Jacob[3] and The Blessing of Moses.[4]

In Numbers 21. v. 14 there is a verse of poetry

[1] See ch. vii.
[2] See ch. vii.
[3] Gen. 49.
[4] Deut. 33.

taken from a lost work called The Book of the Wars of the Lord. The Book of Jasher is also quoted twice,[1] and to judge from the extracts seems to have been a long poem, or a collection of poems, commemorating the ancient glories of Israel. But we do not know when or by whom it was written, nor when or how it disappeared. The speeches of Balaam (Numbers 22-24) are poetry, and the whole story is of a poetical character. As it stands now it suggests that it is an extract from some larger work which has vanished. It is noteworthy that though Balaam is represented as an Inspired Prophet he was not an Israelite.

The difficulties which have been caused by the story of Balaam's Ass, and by the Standing Still of the Sun and Moon at the battle of Beth-horon, need never have arisen if we had remembered that these passages are poetry, and require the reader to exercise his imagination.

The reference to Balaam's Ass in the Second Epistle of St. Peter does not affect the question. The author quotes a well-known story to illustrate his argument. It would not have occurred either to him or to his readers to ask—Did it really happen? because in their eyes that would be beside the point.

A reference to *Hamlet* in a modern sermon would not depend for its value and appropriateness upon the historical existence of the Prince of Denmark. What would matter would be whether the play which Shakespeare wrote about him were well known to the congregation or not.

5. To most people the Bible can only be known by means of translations, and translation from one

[1] Joshua 10. v. 13.; 2 Samuel 1. vv. 17-end.

language into another is always a matter of some difficulty. It is hardly ever possible to get a translation which reproduces the original perfectly. The difficulty is greatest when we come to deal with Proverbs or Metaphors. They depend for their force and meaning upon the associations which attach to them, or are closely bound up with the manners and customs of the people who employ them. A literal translation of a metaphor is often meaningless, and it is sometimes almost impossible to find an equivalent in another language.

Many of our commonest metaphorical expressions are derived from games which the Hebrews did not play, or from the sea, which they feared and detested. The metaphors of the Bible are those which would naturally arise amongst a primitive people, whose principal occupation was agriculture, living in a sub-tropical climate. We cannot hope to understand them unless we can picture to ourselves the conditions which gave them birth. One illustration will be sufficient.

On the twenty-fifth evening of the month our congregations are called upon to say—*For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.*[1] But what meaning do most of them attach to the words?

To us *a bottle* suggests a glass receptacle, and *a bottle in the smoke* does not suggest anything. Nor is it clear why the mysterious sensation which the Psalmist says he underwent should be likely to cause him to forget God's statutes. There must be a key to the meaning somewhere. But it is not in the

[1] Ps. 119. v. 83.

hands of the ordinary worshipper. Wherever the Bible speaks of *bottles* it means leather bottles, *i.e.* wine-skins. No other kind of bottle existed. A wine-skin which has been hung up for a long time in a chimney-corner would naturally become very dry and brittle. It could no longer be used for its proper purpose, and if roughly handled would break to pieces. Now the meaning of the phrase begins to appear. The writer is in the last extremity of weakness and weariness. He feels that his strength is almost at an end, and that he can stand but little more. But despite his exhaustion he will not forget God's statutes.

An English equivalent would be—*Though I am at my last gasp*; and this would give the meaning of the original much more clearly than the literal reading of our Prayer Book.

If we wished to be extremely idiomatic we might translate—*Though I have reached the bitter end.* This is one of our many metaphorical expressions derived from sea-faring. A cable has two ends—*the anchor end* (which needs no explanation) and *the bitter end*, which is made fast to the *bitts* of the ship. When the *bitter end* has been reached it is impossible to pay out another fathom, so nothing more can be done.

6. The difference between Hebrew and English ways of thinking appears again in the Visions recorded in the Prophetical Books. These are described with considerable wealth of detail, and in some cases it is not difficult for us to picture to ourselves what the writer saw. An artist could draw a picture of Ezekiel's *Valley of Dry Bones*,[1] or of Zechariah's

[1] Ch. 37. vv. 1-15.

*Four Chariots*,[1] which would illustrate the scene perfectly well. But this is not always the case. There are Visions which we cannot picture to ourselves in this way. When we read the description of them we cannot see clearly what is being described, and the meaning of the passage is sometimes equally obscure.

It would not be possible to make satisfactory illustrations for the first chapter of Ezekiel. Pencil and paper could not reproduce what he says he saw. And the fifth chapter of Zechariah, if not quite impossible, would not be an easy subject for an artist. A drawing of it would probably strike us as grotesque rather than as impressive. The same applies to the seventh and eighth chapters of Daniel.

What are we to make of these extraordinary apparitions, and how are we meant to interpret them?

(The New Testament lies outside our present scope. But the same difficulty arises in an even more acute form in the Revelation of St. John. That may be described as *A Christian Prophecy*, and any principles of interpretation which hold good of the Prophecies of the Old Testament are to be applied to it.)

When a Prophet sees a vision it means that he undergoes an unusual spiritual experience, which can hardly be criticized by any one who has never experienced the like. This experience inspires him with new ideas, which he has then to translate into human speech for the benefit of other people. This must always be a matter of great difficulty. Upon one occasion St. Paul seems to have found it quite impossible. He does not venture upon any description

[1] Ch. 6. vv. 1-8.

of *the third heaven*, and cannot repeat what he has heard.[1]

Now the expression of any idea involves the employment of some form of Art, whether the medium be painting, or sculpture, or words. And all Art falls into two classes. It may be Pictorial or it may be Symbolic.

Pictorial Art reproduces as faithfully as possible what was actually before the eye of the artist, so that any one who contemplates his work will be able to see at once what he saw. It aims at presenting us with a copy of the original.

The Landscape Painter is the best known example of the pictorial artist. He sits down before the scene which he wishes to paint, and cannot work except when it is before his eyes. He draws it as he sees it, and mixes his paints to reproduce the colours with which Nature has clothed it. If he is successful, any one who knows the place ought to be able to recognize it from the picture.

But the object of Symbolic Art is different. It does not aim at copying any original. Form and colour are of no importance. It aims at suggesting, by means of some other medium, the essential underlying qualities of what has been seen. The visible creation of the artist is nothing. Attention is to be directed to what it suggests.

To borrow a convenient, if half-obsolete term—Pictorial Art is *Objective*; Symbolic, *Subjective*.

Symbolic Art is always the more difficult of the

[1] 2 Cor. 12, vv. 1-4. The reticence of the apostle contrasts sharply with the loquacity of the beings with whom "spiritualist" *mediums* believe themselves to have intercourse.

two to interpret, and its meaning may be completely missed. But it has a great advantage over its rival in that it possesses a much wider range. It can give expression to abstract ideas—Love, Faith, Hope, and the like—which cannot be represented pictorially, because no eye can actually see them. No one could sit as an actual model for *Hope*. The artist who wishes to paint a picture of Hope can only paint a symbolic figure whose attitude and bearing seem to him to suggest Hope. But he cannot be certain that anyone who looks at his picture will understand it.

Most Art contains a mixture of pictorial and symbolic elements. But in modern European Art the pictorial element predominates. We habitually think and express ourselves in pictures; and our natural tendency to do so has probably been increased by the discovery of photography. A photograph is the most purely pictorial production which exists. It cannot admit of any Symbolism at all.

The only form of Symbolic Art which we use regularly is in the political cartoon. There we do use figures, whether of human beings or of animals, which do not really exist, to represent nations. The British Lion, the Russian Bear, the American Eagle, and so forth, are exactly parallel with the creations described in the seventh and eighth chapters of Daniel. But Orientals seem to be much more addicted to Symbolism than we are, perhaps because they are more introspective. In their minds the pictorial idea seems to be always second. Thus a Hindu sculptor does not shrink from portraying his god with three heads or a dozen arms. To us such a

figure appears grotesque and absurd. But to the Hindu such multiplication of members seems to be the natural way of expressing superhuman wisdom and power.

Such figures strike us as monstrous, because they are unfamiliar. But in reality they are not a whit more grotesque than the conventional angel of Christian Art. Since the Greek Centaurs—half man and half horse—European Art has never tolerated anything so monstrous as a human figure with a bird's wing growing from his shoulder-blades. As a picture the absurdity is increased by the fact that the wings are much too small to support the body, and that the muscular development of the body is insufficient for the angel to be able to make any use of them!

Regarded as a conventional symbol, sanctioned by custom, of the Beings which surround the Throne of God, no fault need be found with it. Regarded as a literal picture it is ridiculous. If Eastern Symbolism, whether in the Bible or elsewhere, strikes us as grotesque, we must remember our own angels before we begin to criticize.

Symbolism can be applied to language as much as to any other form of artistic expression. The difference between Pictorial and Symbolic description of a scene is well illustrated by comparing the two following extracts:

1. When rosy plumelets tuft the larch,
And rarely pipes the mounted thrush;
Or underneath the barren bush
Flits by the sea-blue bird of March.

Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, xci.

2. When the Hounds of Spring are on Winter's traces,
   And the Mother of Months, in meadow and plain,
   Fills the shadows and windy places
   With the lisp of leaves and the ripple of rain.

Swinburne, *Atalanta in Calydon.*

As far as the actual words go these two stanzas have nothing in common. But they are both descriptions of the same thing, namely, a day in early spring.

The first paints in words an actual description of what may be seen and heard.

In early spring the larch buds are tufted with pink, and the thrush begins to sing. The bushes have not yet got their leaves, and may therefore be called *barren.* The kingfisher (whose colour is that of the sea upon a sunny day) may be seen flitting along river banks between the overhanging bushes and the water.

The lines are meant to bring before our eyes what the poet actually saw and heard. Anybody who went to the right place at the right time would see and hear the same.

But if we try to interpret the second stanza literally it becomes nonsense. It is not a guide to any actual scene which we may expect to find.

There are no *Hounds of Spring*, and if there were Winter is not a fugitive figure whom they could hunt. No one month is the *Mother* of the rest. It is at least doubtful whether leaves can be said to *lisp*, or rain to *ripple*, or whether shadows can be *filled* with anything.

But criticism of this kind does not touch the force and beauty of the lines. They are an entirely symbolic

description of a spring day, and when so regarded their meaning is perfectly clear.

Any natural tendency to the use of symbolic language which the Hebrews may have possessed originally was increased by their religion. They were forbidden to make *graven images*, and therefore were almost completely debarred from practising the arts of Painting and Sculpture. There are no pictures described in the Old Testament, and very few pieces of sculpture. There were the *Cherubim* overshadowing the Mercy-Seat. But they were concealed in the invisible darkness of the Holy of Holies. The Temple was adorned with a few decorative designs sculptured in relief.[1] There were the oxen supporting the *Molten Sea* (which was further ornamented with lions and cherubim) in the Temple Court, and there were the lions upon the steps of Solomon's Throne. But that seems to have been all.

We are therefore dealing with people unaccustomed to pictorial representation of any kind, who did not naturally think and express themselves in a pictorial way. We must expect to find their literature very deeply coloured by the fact that they lived in a pictureless world.

The visions of the Prophets relate either to the Power and Glory of God (*e.g.* Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1) or to the course of human affairs (*e.g.* Jeremiah 1. vv. 11-14; Zechariah 6; Daniel 7 and 8).

The latter class are the easier to understand, because the subject with which they deal does not by its very nature defy our comprehension. Politics are intelligible; and we can often throw further

[1] 1 Kings 6. v. 23.

light upon the pictures given in the Bible by our general knowledge of the history of the time, derived from other sources. Sometimes we do not know enough to be sure of every detail of the Prophet's meaning. But his general purport is commonly clear enough.

Also, as has been pointed out above, these visions are in form closely parallel with our political cartoons. We are accustomed to represent nations by means of symbolic figures, and are therefore not baffled when we find that the Hebrew Prophets did the same. The practice is simple, obvious, and convenient. But the visions which deal with things divine are in a different category. Here the subject matter is necessarily beyond our comprehension. We can reach out towards it, but we cannot grasp it.

An Inspired Prophet becomes conscious of God as he has never been before. A sense of God's Power and Presence comes upon him with a depth and force hitherto unknown. He has undergone a new and very vivid experience, which he has to communicate to others as well as he can. But this experience is by its very nature almost incommunicable. It cannot be grasped perfectly by human thought; it cannot be translated adequately into any human speech. The Prophet knows that he cannot express the whole of what he has seen. He can, as it were, only sketch it roughly in symbolic language. And we, who study his picture now, can hardly expect to grasp all that it really conveys. An Inspired Prophet could only be understood thoroughly by some one who was upon his own level of inspiration. What he writes must be less than the whole of what

he saw. What we can make of his writings now must be less than the whole of what they meant to him. We cannot expect to do much more than grasp his general drift.

It would no doubt be a gain if we could interpret every detail of his symbolism exactly. It would be a help if we could see why he chose the figures which he did, and what he intended each one of them to mean. Sometimes we are able to do so.

When it is written of the New Jerusalem—*And the City lieth four-square . . . the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal*, we do not try to call up before our eyes an actual building whose measurements are the same every way. But we remember that by ancient ways of thinking the Cube was a recognized Symbol of Perfection. Then the meaning of the description becomes clear.[1]

But we cannot always reach this degree of certainty. We should often need more knowledge than we can possess of the writer's circumstances and habits of thought to be able to say exactly what he meant by every detail of what he wrote.

I do not think that it is possible to interpret accurately every word of the first chapter of Ezekiel. The figures described there may owe something to Babylonian sculptures which he had seen. But we can see that he is attempting to paint the Transcendent Majesty of God; and although our curiosity may be unsatisfied, that is as much as we have any real need to know.

And we can see why his book opens with such a vision. His task was to rouse his countrymen from

[1] Rev. 21. v. 16.

the apathetic stupor into which their captivity had plunged them. They believed that their case was hopeless; he had to convince them that it was not. His text is *With God nothing is impossible.* It was perhaps partly for his own sake, as well as for theirs, that something of the overwhelming Power of God was revealed to him before he began his task.

7. Lastly—When reading the Old Testament we must try to put away our ordinary Christian mental furniture. Many Christian ideas have become so much a part of us that we forget that they are entirely Christian, and that they owe their existence to the Gospel. But if we try to judge the Old Testament by Christian standards, we cannot do the Hebrews justice.

It is impossible to state too plainly, or too often, that no part of the Old Testament reaches Christian level in any respect. It may be thought unnecessary to labour this point. But the belief that any character depicted in the Bible is necessarily regarded as a model by the Church to-day is in fact very widespread. It carries perplexity to some pious minds, and is the principal weapon used by street-corner enemies of Christianity. It has fallen to me to do a certain amount of open-air preaching in a large town in the North of England. During the discussion which followed what I had said, the character of King David was almost invariably brought up. My reply—*David was not a Christian, and did not always behave as a Christian should* always seemed to surprise the audience. It usually produced the retort, delivered with some heat, *Then you don't believe the Bible!*

Nothing is more remarkable than the candour of the Old Testament. It makes no attempt to invest

its heroes with an impossible halo. It does not pretend that they were not men of like passions with ourselves. It paints their weaknesses as vividly as it paints their strength.

Amongst the more highly educated classes the same notion is to be found in an equally preposterous, if slightly different, form. The God of the Old Testament is derided as a Being unworthy not only of worship, but even of respect. He is declared to be nothing but a jealous and vindictive partisan. His principal concern is with His own dignity, and any violation of His arbitrary precepts is visited with ruthless and utterly disproportionate penalties. He ordered His people to do their best to exterminate their neighbours simply in order that His own supremacy might be established.

Closer acquaintance with the teaching of the Old Testament would, of course, compel critics of this class to modify their views considerably. If they were to study Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and Micah (to go no further) they would find passages of a different tenor, which must be considered to carry at least as much weight as those which they are in the habit of citing. But even if the prophetic writings did not exist, such criticism would be emptied of any force which it may now appear to possess if people had grasped the simple fact that nowhere in the Old Testament does the conception of God reach a Christian level. Tried by what has been revealed to us now it is found wanting. Common sense forbids us to expect anything else.

What purpose was served, what purpose could have been served, by the Incarnation of our Lord

if God had already revealed Himself to the Hebrews as fully as He can be revealed to men? Throughout the Old Testament we are avowedly dealing with a limited and imperfect revelation. It is not to be judged by comparison with Christian belief, but by comparison with what was known and believed elsewhere *at the time.*

If *Jehovah* of the Hebrews be compared with *Baal* of the Phoenicians, or with *Chemosh* of the Amorites—His nearest neighbours and natural rivals—the comparison might prove to be not wholly to the discredit of His worshippers' spiritual insight. But such considerations must not lead us to the other extreme of regarding the Old Testament as valueless. Our Lord Himself quoted it continually, and turned to it for support in His hours of trial. It was the only Bible which the first generation of Christians possessed. The Church was nearly a century old before the idea that there could be such a thing as another, Christian, Testament had dawned upon anyone. St. Paul would probably have rejected as profane, and almost blasphemous, any suggestion that his own letters could rank with the Scriptures upon which he had been brought up.

One class of critics takes particular exception to the attitude of the Hebrews towards their enemies. It is true that they often did their best to exterminate their nearest neighbours, and that in doing so believed that they were carrying out a Divine command. It is argued that such an attitude is in the highest degree immoral, and that the sooner a people so blood-thirsty and vindictive are forgotten the better.

The humanitarian sentiment which regards the shedding of blood as, under any circumstances, supremely horrible, seems to be almost confined to England and to North America. It is a recent growth, and is not a product of Christian teaching.

It would be out of place to embark here upon any great discussion of the Christian Theory of Force, or of what ought to be the Christian attitude towards war. It will be enough to point out that Christianity does not regard the preservation of physical life as a matter of supreme importance. Other things may be worth more.

Before we can pass judgment upon the morality of the wars of the Old Testament we must settle one question—What importance do we attach to the preservation of the Hebrew race?

Here the Christian and the heathen have no common ground. The heathen naturally holds that the disappearance of the Hebrews would have been no more loss to the world than the disappearance of their first cousins, the Phoenicians, has been. They were merely one petty Semitic tribe, whose civilization was not in advance of that of their neighbours. It was not worth while that Amorites or Amalekites should be exterminated in order that Hebrews should survive. The world would have lost nothing appreciable if the Amalekites had done the exterminating.

But the Christian holds that there was a time when nothing could be of so much importance to the whole world as that the Hebrews should continue to exist.

In their early days they were not a missionary people. The continuance of their religion was bound up with the continuance of their race. No Christian

nation can claim so much importance for itself to-day, because Christianity would not vanish from the earth with its disappearance.

But if, after their occupation of Canaan, the Hebrews had been absorbed by the surrounding tribes, so that there had ceased to be anything distinctive about them, there could have been no Jewish Church. There could have been no Prophets to foster the hope of a *Kingdom of God* to come, and there would have been no such hope in the world. Finally, there could not have been a Jewish Virgin named Mary to bring forth a Son. Christians who believe that God was pleased to use one small people for the whole world's salvation cannot forget that for many centuries everything depended upon the preservation of one tiny tribe.

Are we who owe the means of grace and the hope of glory to the fact that that tribe did not perish really in a position to criticize the steps which it took to make its existence secure? Can we condemn its conviction that in taking those steps it was acting in obedience to the will of God?

If the annihilation of the Amalekites was necessary in order that the Gospel according to St. John should be written, has the price paid been excessive?

The ancient Hebrew was prepared to take sword in hand, to risk his own life warring against those whom he regarded as the enemies of God and of all righteousness. His ideals were narrower than those which God has made possible for us now. But he was prepared to stake everything in their defence. He fought for the honour of Jehovah at least as much as for any personal gain.

It is at least an open question whether his spiritual level is really below that of his modern critic, who regards the *Honour of God* as an empty superstition, and does not believe that there can be any principle for which it is worth while to fight. In the Old Testament we trace the growth of a religion which is very intimately bound up with the national life of the people by whom it was professed. For many centuries it reflects their chequered fortunes. The record which we possess now is avowedly incomplete, and a large part of it does not profess to be contemporary with the occurrences which it describes.

The religion of the Hebrews is not ours to-day, because the fuller revelation which we have received has enabled us to pass beyond it. The Incarnation has given us a deeper and truer knowledge of what God is like (and therefore of what He would have His children be) than it was possible for men to possess before. In the Old Testament we see the earlier stages of the growth whose fruit is now in our hands. The tree itself is not to be despised because the trunk is worth less than the fruit which it eventually bore.

The Hebrew religion contained much that was crude and fierce, especially in its earlier days. But it is always full of promise, because it never professed to be more than an unfinished growth. Avowedly it always looked forward to some fulfilment in the future which should transcend the present. It could only fail if it became satisfied with itself. This is the argument worked out by a Christian writer, who had perhaps himself been a Jewish Priest, in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

In the arts of civilization the Hebrews are not to be compared with Egypt, Persia or Greece. They never lost their respect for *the wisdom of the Egyptians*, whose culture was more ancient and more splendid than their own. But their religion possessed an immeasurable superiority over that of their more highly civilized and powerful neighbours, in that its conceptions were not absolutely fixed. It spoke with uncompromising severity of the Righteousness which is demanded of men by the fact that God is Righteous, though at first the righteousness which it inculcated was not of a very lofty type. But as the Hebrews came to understand more of what is meant by saying that *God is Righteous*, their conception of the Righteousness which they ought to practise rose correspondingly. Thus they never outgrew their religion (as other ancient nations were apt to do) because it presented them with an ideal capable of indefinite expansion. It was never possible for a Jew to feel what more than one Greek thinker came to feel—namely, that he was morally superior to his God, or that if he were not, he certainly ought to be.[1]

It does not matter very much to us now what the Hebrew religion was like when it began. We have no real reason for resenting its many obvious imperfections. What does concern us is the goal to which it led its adherents (almost in spite of themselves), and the outcome of it which became possible.

When reading the written records of the Hebrews we must remember that they are the work of men

[1] *E.g.* Xenophanes, *ap. Sext. Math.* ix. 193 (Ritter and Preller, *Philosophiae Graecae*, p. 78).

who were very unlike ourselves. All Christians believe the writers to have been *Inspired*. But that does not entitle us to say that they must have worked in any one particular way. We do not of ourselves know what manner of thing *Inspiration* is, nor how it is likely to affect those upon whom God has been pleased to bestow it.

We must study the Scriptures as patiently and carefully as we can, noting the varying nature of their contents, and trying to discover how they were written and brought into their present form. We must not bring our own ideas to them, but must try to enter into the mind of the original writers. Then we shall begin to understand how, and for what purpose, God has been pleased to reveal Himself to men.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BOOKS OF MOSES

We are accustomed to divide the books which make up the Old Testament into four classes:

1. The Pentateuch or "Books of Moses," consisting of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

2. The historical books, consisting of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I. and II. Samuel, I. and II. Kings, I. and II. Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.[1]

3. The Prophets, which we generally subdivide into four *major*—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—and twelve *minor*—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

4. The five books which cannot be classed under any of the foregoing heads: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. We may make six of this last class if we separate the Lamentations of Jeremiah from his Prophecy.

Of these, Job, the Psalms, and the Song of Solomon are entirely poetical. The Proverbs are partly poetry

[1] Ruth and Esther may be placed among the historical books because they deal with historical episodes, albeit of a private character. They are history, though not national history.

and partly "didactic" prose. Ecclesiastes may be described as a sermon. The Lamentations are poetry.

This classification is that of the Greek translation of the Bible, generally known as the Septuagint,[1] which was begun at Alexandria about the year 250 B.C. It was made primarily for the Jewish residents there, who had severed their connection with Palestine so completely that they were no longer able to read the Scriptures in Hebrew. Its arrangement of the books was established in Western Europe by the Latin translation made by St. Jerome at the end of the fourth century. He followed the order which he found in the already well-known version of "The Seventy."

But this is not the classification adopted by the Jews themselves. They did not describe any books as historical. According to their reckoning the Bible consisted of The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings. The Law consisted of the five "Books of Moses," and occupied a pre-eminent position. It was regarded with extraordinary reverence, and there was a feeling that its importance could not be exaggerated. Legends sprang up about it: as that it had existed before the Creation of the World, and that God Himself studied it for three hours out of every twenty-four.

Next in honour to the Law (*Torah*) came The Prophets (*Nabiim*). These were subdivided into the Earlier Prophets and the Later Prophets.

The Earlier Prophets were Joshua, Judges, the two books of Samuel and the two books of the Kings.

[1] From the legend that it was produced by a group of Seventy (Latin *Septuaginta*) scholars.

The Later Prophets comprised Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and our twelve Minor Prophets reckoned as one book.[1] Daniel was not included amongst the Prophets at all.

This arrangement is interesting for several reasons:

1. It shows that the word *Prophet* did not suggest to a Jew exactly what it suggests to us. If *Prophecy* is to be regarded as solely, or even chiefly, the foretelling of future events, the *Earlier Prophets* of the Jews are not Prophets. What we count as history the Jews counted as prophecy. And since *Prophecy*, as we use the word, is a Hebrew creation, the Jews must be entitled to say what class of writings are to be described as *Prophetic*.

It is therefore possible that our ordinary ideas as to what prophetic inspiration means, and as to what a Prophet really tries to do, stand in need of very thorough revision.

2. They did not reckon Daniel among the Prophets. Yet many English readers of the Bible seem to consider that his book bears upon our own time more directly than any other part of the Old Testament.

Now, as during the long struggle with Napoleon, attempts are made to shew that Daniel foretold this war, and to deduce from his writings how and when it will end. It would be interesting to know whether modern Jews have any knowledge of these efforts, and if so, how they regard them.

[1] This serves to illustrate the Oriental indifference to accurate chronology. No one could ever have supposed that the Twelve Minor Prophets were even approximately contemporary.

3. Though the books of the Chronicles cover much of the same ground as the books of the Kings, they were not regarded as on the same level of authority.

4. The absence of any classification of any books as historical suggests that the attitude of the Jews towards the past was not identical with our own.

That they were proud of their past as a whole is not open to question. Certain episodes in it were never to be forgotten. But the merging of history in prophecy shows that they did not attach as much importance as we do to accurate knowledge of the exact details of the past. Whether their view or ours is the better does not concern us now. The point is that the two attitudes towards the past are different.

The third division of the Old Testament was called The Writings (*Kethubim*), and comprised all the books which were not included in The Law or The Prophets.

The Writings themselves were further subdivided. But that is a detail which does not immediately concern us.

In the eyes of the Jews themselves The Law and The Prophets were, so to speak, the real Bible. They are bracketed together by Our Lord.[1] Moses and Elijah,[2] the typical representatives of the two great divisions of the Scriptures, were seen at the Transfiguration.

[1] St. Matt. 11. v. 13.

[2] We possess no writings ascribed to Elijah, and there is no reason to suppose that any ever existed. But he was the Prophet *par excellence* in later Jewish eyes, and stood for Prophetic Inspiration in general. He has come to occupy a large place in Jewish and Mohammedan legend.

If the Prophets did not quite take rank with the Law, The Writings were not to be classed with either. They were not considered to be upon the same level.

The whole collection which now forms our Old Testament is, and always will be, sacred and venerable in Jewish and Christian eyes. Every part of it has a claim upon our attention, and contains matter for our instruction.[1] But the people to whom we owe it did distinguish between different parts. They recognized different degrees of importance, if not different degrees of inspiration.

It is possible that the Christian Church would have been able to read the Old Testament with more profit if this fact had been generally remembered.

The five "Books of Moses" are known to us by the titles which were given to them in the Greek translation referred to above. *Genesis* means *Birth*, and is a natural title to give to a book which opens with the story of the Creation of the World.

*Exodus* means *Going out*, and records the story of the escape of the Israelites from Egypt.

The word *Leviticus* is an adjective, and means *Having to do with Levi*. The title is due to the fact that the book contains the regulations for the sacrifices of the Tabernacle, and for all matters connected with its administration, including many things which we should not now consider to be within the province of ecclesiastical authority. The conduct of these was in the hands of the tribe of Levi.

(The book may be compared with the rubrics and canons of our Church.)

[1] Cf. Rom. 15. v. 4; 1 Cor. 10. v. 11; 2 Tim. 3. vv. 15 and 16.

The book *Numbers* opens with an account of a census of the Israelites taken by Moses.

*Deuteronomy* means *The Second Law-giving*. The book derives its title from the fact that it contains a repetition and re-inforcement of the covenant already made between God and the Israelites. It ends with the death of Moses upon Mount Pisgah in sight of the land of Canaan.

Thus these five books profess to be a history of the Israelites from the very earliest times until they had reached the threshold of the Promised Land, which they subsequently occupied. We have virtually no other sources of information by which to check or amplify them.

But a very brief examination of them is sufficient to shew that they do not profess to be a complete history.

For instance, Genesis ends with the arrival of Jacob and his family in Egypt. Exodus opens with the Birth of Moses, who led the Israelite nation out of Egypt into the wilderness. But the Jews themselves always believed that they had been in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years,[1] and there is no reason for questioning the tradition.

Accordingly there is a gap of nearly four hundred years between the events narrated at the end of Genesis and at the beginning of Exodus. The Bible merely summarizes this period very briefly by saying that the Israelites increased in numbers and were enslaved by the Egyptians. It does not attempt to go into details.

Again, the wandering in the wilderness, between

[1] Exodus 12. v. 40.

leaving Egypt and entering Canaan, is always said to have lasted for forty years. But the story, as we have it now, does not account for so long a period. Much of the time is passed over in silence. Accordingly, it is obvious that what we have is not a complete history. It is what the Jews knew of their own early history when they came to write it down afterwards. Nor does the narrative profess to be contemporary. It is plainly impossible that the earlier portions should be, and the latest episode, the story of the death of Moses, contains the words "*but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. . . . and there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses.*"[1]

That is not the language of a contemporary, or even approximately contemporary, writer. It could only be used by a man who was writing of what had taken place long before his own day. How long before must be more or less a matter of conjecture. But that the record is not contemporary there can be no question.[2]

So much is obvious to the English reader. And a careful study of the original Hebrew reveals the fact that the books as we have them now are a combination of the work of at least three hands. There were two main strands of narrative, which are generally called by scholars J and E on account of the different words (*Jehovah* and *Elohim* in English letters) which they use for God.

[1] Deut. 34. vv. 6-10.

[2] An account of the Plagues of Egypt differing from that contained in the Book of Exodus is to be found in the Book of Wisdom, Ch. 17 and 18.

These two narratives, which do not always agree, have been combined and edited, with considerable additions, by a third hand. This editor is generally known as P, because of the predominance of Priestly interests in his mind.

J, E, and P are all anonymous, and we have no means of discovering their identity. Nor can we fix the sources from which they may have drawn their information. In some cases there may have been documents or inscriptions,[1] but for the most part they were probably dependent upon oral tradition. They took the stories which were current amongst the Jews and cast them in the form of a consecutive narrative, leaving gaps where they were obliged to do so.

To some people this may sound rather startling. What, it may be asked, becomes of the early books of the Bible if they are not the work of Moses, the man of God? If they are a composite work, drawn from unknown sources, which has passed through various hands, and did not reach its final form until centuries after the latest of the events which it describes, how can we value it? What becomes of its title to *Inspiration*?[2]

[1] Reference has already been made in Ch. I. to the Book of Jasher, the Book of the Wars of the Lord, and to the story of Balaam and Balak. Genesis 14 reads as if the greater part of it had been taken direct from an inscription. If so, it may well be the oldest part of the Bible. Portions of Leviticus suggest that a very ancient *Law of Holiness* has been worked into a later book.

[2] An attempt will be made to answer this question later with reference to the Old Testament generally. At present we are only concerned with surveying the material before us.

It is true that in view of these facts some common ideas as to the nature and meaning of *Inspiration* cannot stand. But as has been pointed out in Chapter I. we must not bring to our reading of the Bible fixed pre-conceived ideas of what *Inspiration* ought to mean.

We cannot increase the value of the Bible by imagining it to be anything which it is not. We can lose nothing by discovering what it is really.

The " Books of Moses " nowhere profess to have been written by Moses himself. Four of them are principally concerned with what he said and did. They might be called *The Life of Moses*; but they do not themselves profess to be an autobiography.

If the final editor wished to make them appear to be by one single hand, he did not bring much skill to his task. In default of evidence to the contrary, it is better to assume that he was entirely honest, and did not wish to conceal from his readers the fact that he was combining and editing a number of different narratives of varying dates.

If the Jews came to believe subsequently that these books were by Moses' own hand, the belief was not the result of any critical enquiry. It represented no more than a tradition, which seemed more probable to them than it does to us.

Without Moses the Hebrews would never, so far as we can see, have become an independent nation. They would have continued to be slaves in Egypt. The Sacred Law was the mainspring of their national life, and made them a distinctive people. Something of the kind must have originated with Moses himself, though we cannot say whether any of his personal

legislation has come down to us. But although the Law may have grown gradually through many centuries, he was in a real sense the author of it all. The whole body of it was personified for all time in him.

Accordingly, it was natural and right that the books which contained it should bear his name. It is not wonderful if a much later age came to look upon them as his own handiwork.

The Jews were accustomed to use titles implying authorship much more loosely than we do. We know that it became common for them to label a book with some great name from the remote past. The practice was no more than a literary convention, and was not intended to deceive anybody.

During the period between the Old Testament and the New, numbers of such books were produced, of which the Wisdom of Solomon,[1] the Psalms of Solomon and the Book of Enoch are the best known. They make no attempt to hide the fact that they were not written until long after the death of their titular authors. No one could be misled by the title which, as far as it meant anything, meant that the book contained what a writer, who preferred to remain anonymous, thought that Solomon or Enoch or some other great figure of the past might say if he were still alive.

The point is worth noting, because it shews that the Jews did not take questions of authorship as seriously as we do. If a famous name were prefixed to a book, it need be little more than a general indication of the nature of its contents. In this sense the

[1] Included in the Apocrypha.

books of the Law were the "Books of Moses"; the more so as they also contained the story of his life. Their value is not diminished, nor in Jewish eyes is their right to their title removed, if no part of them as they stand now is Moses' own composition.[1]

This is emphatically one of the respects in which, when we read the Bible, the difference between the ancient Jewish and modern English standpoint must be borne in mind.

Of the Books of Moses, Genesis is the best known, and has been the subject of the most controversy. Its early chapters are the principal field in which the supposed battle between Science and Religion has been fought.

Discussion has been focussed chiefly upon four stories, of which the last has perhaps attracted less attention than any of the other three:

*A*. The Story of the Creation; *B*. The Story of the Fall; *C*. The Flood; *D*. The Tower of Babel.

Now there is one fact which is sometimes overlooked, which must affect very considerably our view of all these stories.

No Christian questions the idea that the Hebrews were the Chosen People. They believed that they stood in a unique relation to God; and we hold that this belief is borne out by the religious writings which they have given to the world. If they had not called themselves the Chosen Race, should not we have been almost compelled to give them some such title? It is hard to see what other theory could be found adequate to their extraordinary history.

[1] Of course the same holds good of the Psalms of David and the Proverbs of Solomon.

The question of the "Call" of Abram does not depend upon the date or authorship of Genesis 12-17. It is attested, if anything on earth can be considered ever to have been attested by experience, by the world's spiritual debt to Abram's seed.

But before Abram, the Hebrews had no separate existence. They were, as they themselves knew, one small branch of a stock whose original home was in Babylonia.[1] Their ancestors were at one time Babylonians, with nothing distinctive about them. They did not emerge until the day when Abram moved out of Haran to the south-west. Then they became a separate unit, and as time went on came to differ more and more widely from their blood-relations.[2]

We have a close parallel in our own history. At one time there were no English. We were merely one Germanic tribe, not to be distinguished from any other. The English nation was born, and what may be called English history began, on the day when our forefathers crossed the North Sea. We then began to become different from the other Germanic tribes, and at the end of something less than fifteen centuries the difference has become very wide.

In the period covered by the first eleven chapters of Genesis there was no *Chosen Race*. The Hebrews as such did not exist. Accordingly, we should naturally expect to find nothing very distinctive here. The subject matter is likely to be common to the whole Semitic race. Stories of the Creation, the

[1] Cf. Deut. 26. v. 5; Joshua 24. vv. 2 and 3.

[2] The Babylonians, Phoenicians (Canaanites), Syrians and Arabs.

Flood, and so forth, closely parallel to those current amongst the Hebrews, may reasonably be looked for amongst their neighbours and blood-relations. It would be surprising if none were to be found.

If there is anything of distinctive value in this group of Bible stories it must be less in the subject matter than in the way in which the story is told. The tone of the author of this part of Genesis is much more important than either his actual method or the sources from which it may have been derived.

Let us now proceed to consider the four stories a little more closely.

A. *The Creation.*

Regarded as a picture of pre-historic conditions, the first chapter of Genesis is of very little value. We know much more than could have been known to its author of the early history of the globe. Our knowledge does not profess to be complete; but we know that the world is very much older than men used to suppose, and that it has passed through many gradual changes before it reached its present condition.

Attempts to fix periods are not much more than guess-work. But we are probably safe in saying that some form of life has existed on the earth for at least half-a-million years, and that the appearance of the human race cannot be placed at less than one hundred and fifty thousand years before our own day.

The first chapter of Genesis cannot be brought into harmony with these discoveries; though it is worth noting that it does recognize that Creation was a gradual process, and that Man is a late arrival.

If we choose to regard the Bible as a text-book of natural science, then these chapters have been proved

to be untrue. But what reason have we for regarding it as anything of the kind?

The Bible is concerned with religion, and religion deals with causes: it is not directly concerned with processes. They may prove to be interesting, more interesting than we had supposed; but so far as religion is concerned, they matter very little.

What concerns us is the statement with which the chapter opens:

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

We should perhaps appreciate it more if we were less familiar with it. Its implications are far-reaching and of the greatest importance.

1. *The world which we see is not eternal.*

It is not something self-existent, sustained by its own inherent power, owing nothing to anything outside itself. It is not a source, but an outcome—of something.

2. *It does not owe its origin to chance.*

This was the view taken by the disciples of the Greek philosopher Epicurus. It was preached in Latin by the great Roman thinker Lucretius.[1] He postulated a shower of atoms streaming from all eternity through boundless space. Presently two of them came into collision. The jolt deflected them from their course, and brought them into further collision with others. The process once begun could not be stopped, and the various atoms were forced by it into innumerable combinations. These combinations have resulted in the world which we see. It is due to the fortuitous jostling of innumerable atoms, and to nothing else.

[1] *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), written about the middle of the first century B.C.

This theory seems to have satisfied one of the most acute and comprehensive minds which Rome ever produced, though to us it seems to raise at least as many difficulties as it solves.

3. *The world owes its origin to the will of a Person.* It came into existence as the deliberate expression of a definite purpose.

Compare this view with the legends which prevailed among the Greeks of savage anarchy in Heaven and rival gods at war.

Chronos mutilates his father and devours his own offspring: all but one who is saved by his mother. The child who escapes is Zeus, and finally dethrones his unnatural father. The details of this story are unfit for repetition.

The Greeks were one of the most highly gifted races which the world has yet seen. Yet the books [1] which were to them much what Genesis was to the Hebrews taught that out of the welter of obscene ferocity everything in heaven and earth had sprung. Later thinkers who condemned such stories as immoral and ridiculous were generally suspected of atheism.[2]

Or compare the belief of our own forefathers, that in the beginning a Primaeval Cow licked the snow from a Primaeval Plain in search of pasture. Where her tongue exposed the earth, armed men appeared whose wars are the beginning of human history. Apart from any difficulties which might be felt as to the origin of the Cow, a legend of this type is immoral, because it makes bloodshed and violence the foundation of all human development.

[1] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 137. 453. [2] Cf. Ch. I. p. 27 n.

4. *Because the world owes its existence to the will of a Person it is a reality, and possesses real importance.* This view is, to say the least, more encouraging than what appears to be the view of Hinduism. Hinduism in all its forms seems to hold that the created order is an illusion. It is simply Brahm's dream, of no more real value than any other dream. When he wakes it will cease to be.

It is obvious that, whatever philosophers may say, this theory cannot conduce to any very lofty standard of conduct. Indeed, if it be seriously accepted, morality cannot exist. For if there is nothing real about anything within our present cognizance, nothing which we may say or do can really matter.

The first chapter of Genesis gives us the reflections of a deeply religious mind upon what was commonly believed amongst the nations to which he belonged as to the earliest history of the world. His *data*, for which he was not personally responsible, were incomplete. But that does not matter. What is important is the conclusion to which his reflections led him, which he prefixed to his book—*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

We can hardly appreciate the sublimity and force of that statement until we have compared it with the beliefs to be found elsewhere. Then its true proportions begin to appear. And when we begin to perceive them we may fairly ask—If the man who could write that more than two thousand years ago was not inspired, what does the word *Inspiration* mean? What sort of writing could be regarded as inspired if that is not?

As a statement of fact, the first verse of Genesis

may or may not be true. There are arguments both for and against it which are much too long and elaborate to be even sketched here. And they do not concern us now. Our purpose is not to discuss whether God exists, but to estimate the value of what the Bible says about Him.

What immediately concerns us is this. The question whether God created the heaven and the earth is one which natural science can never touch. Natural science can describe, with ever-increasing wealth of detail, the stages through which the visible world has passed. But as to the ultimate origin and fixed purpose of what we see now it can have nothing to say. It supplies an answer to the question—*How has this come about?* But the question—*Why has this come about?* is outside its province. Religious thinkers ought to recognize with gratitude that natural science has shewn God to be a more wonderful Person than we had supposed. It has called our attention to examples of His Wisdom, His Power, and His Patience (especially of His Patience) of which we had never dreamed. But when it has done that it has reached the limits of its powers. Any attempt to go further is an intrusion into the domain of religious philosophy, which can only make the intruders ridiculous.

We ought to have a deeper reverence for God now than was possible for the author of the first chapter of Genesis. Because we know better than he did what the Work of Creation has involved. Future generations will doubtless add to our knowledge, and will thus become able to worship Him better than we can.

B. *The Garden of Eden.*

It is natural for all people to look back to a Golden Age long ago. Once upon a time men were braver and stronger and women more beautiful. The earth yielded fruit more abundantly and without labour. Wild animals were the friends of man. Disease was unknown; and if death came at all, it came as a peaceful sleep at the end of a life prolonged far beyond our span. I imagine that there is no part of the world where such myths are not to be found.

It would probably have never occurred to the author of Genesis that his Garden was to be regarded in any other light. His description of it is plainly ideal, and corresponds, we may say with confidence, with nothing which ever was to be found upon earth. His Four Rivers may have been prompted by reminiscences of Babylonian irrigation canals. The *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* is as much a growth of fairyland as its Babylonian counterpart whose root was of lapis lazuli.

It does not really matter whether the human race ever actually consisted of one solitary pair. It might be interesting to know, but the point has no bearing upon religion.[1] Nor need we assume that there was ever a serpent which spoke with a human voice. Throughout the Bible the *Serpent*—whether conceived as a land-snake or as a sea-monster—

[1] When St. Paul draws a contrast between the *first* and *second Adam* his point is that the entire human race is within the scope of Christ's work. The validity of his argument and our own belief in Redemption do not depend upon regarding the *first Adam* as a historical personage.

is the type of all evil and of every power hostile to God.[1]

What spot on earth could be said to be watered by a river of which one *head* is the Euphrates, and another "*compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia*," *i.e.* is in Africa?

The careful specification of the Four Rivers suggests that the author wished to emphasize the fact that he was not attempting to draw a literal picture of an actual place. He seems to have taken particular pains to ensure that his readers should understand that no explanation could ever discover the site of the *Garden of God.*

The Jews themselves came to regard Eden as an entirely ideal spot. This is shewn by a passage in Ezekiel,[2] to which perhaps full weight has not always been given by English readers. Speaking of the contemporary King of Tyre he says—*Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God . . . thou art the anointed cherub that covereth.*

No one supposes that those words were meant to be taken literally. The King of Tyre was the enemy of Israel, and his power had been destroyed. Ezekiel is dwelling upon the greatness of his fall, as one striking instance of the unexpected and irresistible nature of God's judgments. What seems in men's eyes to be established for ever in absolute security may be overthrown in a moment by Him.

The King is said to have been *a cherub in Eden* as a way of expressing that he had reached the summit of felicity and glory. There had been nothing left for which he could be expected to wish.

[1] Cf. Isaiah 51. v. 9; Amos 9. v. 3; Rev. 12. vv. 1-9.
[2] 28. vv. 13 and 14.

It may be a shock to some people now to be told that the story of Adam and Eve is not history. Possibly it would have been as great a shock to the author if he had been told that anyone would ever think that it was!

Origen of Alexandria, who was perhaps the most learned and laborious student of the Bible who has ever lived, writing early in the third century, assumes that no one will ever regard it as anything except an allegory.[1] The idea that it is history has certainly not always been held by the Church. I do not know whether it was ever at all general before the Middle Ages. It does not seem to have crossed the mind of St. Ambrose, who was Bishop of Milan from 374-397. He was particularly fond of preaching on Old Testament subjects, and always treats the stories as allegories. It seems to have become a matter of universal belief in England during the seventeenth century, when men who were ignorant of Oriental methods of expression, and unacquainted with the writings of early Christian commentators, set themselves to read the Bible with great diligence.

Some "modern" criticism of the Bible would be unnecessary if the works of the early Fathers, to whom the Church of England avowedly appeals, were better known.

5. *The Fall.*

The story of the Fall seems to present more difficulty than the story of Creation. Granted that the setting is mythical, and is therefore unaffected by geological or archaeological research, the point of the story has still to be considered. The Bible

[1] *Philocalia*, C. 17.

teaches that Man has *fallen*: that is to say, that the human race is now upon a plane below that upon which it stood once: upon which it might be standing now.

Here we are not concerned with the form in which the teaching is given, but with the substance of the teaching itself. Not only is the Fall taught in the third chapter of Genesis, but it is necessarily assumed in all Christian teaching. The whole doctrine of Redemption depends upon it. The idea of Redemption is meaningless if there is nothing from which we have any need to be redeemed. And we *cannot* be redeemed unless we are now upon a lower level than the one which we ought to occupy.

Natural growth into larger powers may be a gain. But it is not Redemption. Redemption means putting us back into the position from which we had fallen. We have not been *bought with a price*, and have nothing particular for which to thank God if we have always been travelling more or less smoothly along the road to perfection.

Nothing is more distasteful to one type of modern mind than the Christian doctrine of Redemption. The very large number of people who find their spokesmen in such writers as Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. Arnold Bennett object strongly to being told that they are *miserable sinners*. They repudiate (with a vehemence which suggests that they are not, after all, really quite at ease upon the point) the notion that they have any need of Divine forgiveness for their past, and of Divine help for their future.

But we need not linger over their standpoint. We are only concerned with the difficulties which the story of the Fall may present to a Christian.

It seems certain that the beginnings of life upon the globe consisted of a very few very simple forms. It is possible that all existing forms of life have been derived from one original type. Little by little life has been developing fresh powers, and creating a more elaborate organism for itself. This process, which is called *Evolution*, has gone on for an incalculable period, and has led to the many different kinds of living creatures, some higher, some lower in the scale of being, which inhabit the world to-day.

The human race has shared this process. Our bodies have much in common with those of the higher types of animals, and our physical resemblance to the ape-family is too obvious to be overlooked.

It would not be quite true to say that men are descended from monkeys. But it seems probable that the men and monkeys of to-day trace their descent from a common ancestor, who, if we were confronted with him now, would probably strike us as much more like a monkey than a man. At any rate, that is a possibility which cannot be ignored.

Assuming it to be the case, no difficulty arises in connection with the story of Creation. Whatever the early history of our race may have been, it is a fact that men to-day possess a sense of right and wrong of which monkeys display no trace. Experience has proved that there is no type of man to whom it is impossible to teach religion.[1] But it is not

[1] Charles Darwin subscribed for many years to the South American Missionary Society because he saw that they were able to make something of the natives of Tierra del Fuego, whom he regarded as below the reach of any civilizing agency. In modern times the Government of Queensland has found itself compelled

possible to teach religion to monkeys. No one proposes to try, or could hope to succeed if he did.

There is an essential difference in respect of spiritual capacity between the lowest type of man and the highest type of ape to be found in the world to-day.

It may not always have existed. But it does exist now. Accordingly, it must have appeared in some branch of the ape-family, or in an individual member of some branch of the ape-family, at some time in the past. As soon as it appeared, that ape became what we understand by a man, whatever he may have been before. He became capable of possessing a religious history; and as the Bible is concerned with religion, any developments which our race may have undergone before it became capable of a religious history lie outside its province. We may fairly consider that Man was *created* when he became recognizable as Man. The preparation for his *creation* may have extended over many thousands of years. But that does not affect us now.

*Evolution* is merely the description of a process, and has nothing to say about causes or results. It is at least doubtful whether it can cover the appearance of a capacity for religion in a creature which did not possess it before.

But if the tendency of life has been to advance from lower to higher forms, and if what we know of our own history shews that mankind has followed the same course, what do we mean when we speak of

to support the missions of the Australian Church at the Mitchell and Yarrabah rivers for the same reason. Other instances could be quoted.

*The Fall?* If we have risen from apes to savages, and from savages to civilized men with steadily increasing spiritual powers, in what sense can we describe ourselves as a *Fallen Race?*

To avoid confusion it may be worth while to point out that the *Fall* applies to the *moral* sphere only. There is no reason for holding that our race was ever as a whole upon a higher *intellectual* level than it is now. Such a saying as "*An Aristotle is but the rubbish of an Adam*" can claim no support from Scripture, and is at war with history and with common sense. The events of the last three years have emphasized the fact that intellectual and moral development do not necessarily go together. A very ignorant man may have a more sensitive conscience and obey it more faithfully than the most learned occupant of a professorial chair.

Now one outstanding fact in the spiritual consciousness of mankind is the sense of Sin.

All the world over, from the earliest times of which we possess any record, Man has been conscious of what the Bible calls "*The plague of his own heart.*" [1] He has been aware—how or why he may be unable to say—that something is wrong both with the world in general and with himself. He knows that his deepest need, compared with which all other needs are trivial, is to set this wrong right. *Wash me throughly from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin* [2] is a universal cry of the human heart.

That is attested by the literature of every age and every country. No student of mankind can leave it out of account. Some modern writers dismiss the

[1] 1 Kings 8. v. 38. [2] Ps. 51. v. 2.

sense of Sin lightly. They hold that it ought not to exist, and that it does not correspond with anything which can be counted real. Sooner or later they are bound to run upon the rock of experience. It is only possible to doubt the reality of Sin and its consequences by living in a world of our own fancies, and by deliberately shutting our eyes to anything which we do not want to see. Five minutes' honest study either of ourselves or of the world about us is enough to settle the question.

Any teaching which attempts to ignore or belittle sin is merely an academic fallacy, and will never be able to stand the test of real life. We might as well argue that it is possible to moor a battleship with a piece of ordinary string! In the seclusion of our studies we might prove that no other tackle ought to be used. But one honest experiment would upset our most subtle and conclusive theories.

All religions worth anything have addressed themselves to the question of Sin. They have recognized the need for Purification, and have set themselves to satisfy it.

But though some pagan creeds contain much that is pure and noble, they fail in this particular point, because they do not go deep enough. Their conception both of Sin and of Purification has always tended to crystallize into something entirely ceremonial.[1] *Sin* has been understood to mean little more than an offence against a ceremonial law which is to be met by ceremonial purification. Where they have recognized the need of a new heart they have found themselves unable to provide for its

[1] *E.g.* Touching a dead body, or eating an *unclean* animal.

creation. Accordingly, though they have worked well up to a point—and no Christian need wish to disparage their value—they have broken down in the hour of their adherents' greatest need. They have been proved to be fair-weather religions only. When the burden of Sin is felt to be absolutely intolerable they have nothing adequate to offer.

The story of the Fall is a meditation upon Sin marked by very profound spiritual insight. It may be summarized as follows:

1. *Sin goes back to the early dawn of human history.*

2. *It is neither inevitable nor involuntary.*

Eve need not have listened to the serpent, and he could not have compelled her to eat the fruit. She could not have compelled Adam to do so. Both did what they knew to be wrong, and did it of their own choice.[1]

3. *The first outcome of Sin is to destroy the relationship which ought to exist between Man and his Maker.*

After they had eaten the fruit, Adam and Eve were afraid to face God. Sin makes us wish to avoid God. It does not make Him turn His back upon us.

4. *The immediate practical consequences of Sin are serious and lasting.*

Inevitably they fall on others beside the original sinner. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden never to return, and therefore all their descendants suffer loss.

[1] It is obvious how this teaching sweeps away the excuses which we are in the habit of making for ourselves, and may if we make them often enough come to regard as true. The Bible always gives the lie to—"*I couldn't help it.*"

5. *But though the power of Sin is great, Man may overcome it.*

The struggle is not hopeless. The Seed of the Woman is destined to bruise the serpent's head. We cannot say how far the writer who penned the promise foresaw the way in which it would be fulfilled. The point is that he saw the possibility.

Does not all experience—our own inner personal experience and the collective experience of mankind recorded in the pages of history—attest every one of these conclusions? What description can we give of the insight and courage needed to draw them originally unless we say that the writer was inspired by God?

Is there any doubt that we have all *fallen* in our own lives as Adam and Eve *fell*—by deliberately choosing what we knew to be wrong? And if every member of mankind has fallen again and again, we can hardly quarrel with the expression—*A Fallen Race.* What is true of every individual must be true of the race as a whole.

There is only one other creed which approaches adequacy in its attitude towards Sin, and that is Buddhism. The Buddha, who lived in India about 600 B.C., was profoundly convinced of the seriousness of Sin, and came to the conclusion that Sin is part of the will. Any motion of the human will must necessarily be sinful. In the eyes of a Buddhist a Purified Will is impossible. His goal is therefore the Cessation of Desire, *i.e.* Annihilation of the Will. Only so can a way of escape from Sin be found.

But this is a counsel of despair. It means that there is nothing to be done with or in or for this world. It is the extreme depth of pessimism.

Contrast it with the Christian view, and the spiritual value of Genesis 3 is thrown into the sharpest possible relief. We hold that Sin, albeit serious and of long standing, is not part of the Will, but an intrusion into it. It was not there originally, but came in from outside. Therefore it can be driven out again.

Accordingly our goal is not the Annihilation of the Will, but its Purification. That is the height of optimism.

The Buddhist and Christian views of Sin are the only two which go deep enough to be able to make any real claim upon our allegiance. Others ignore some part of the problem, or belittle it. And these two views are as far apart as the poles. One is the depth of despair, the other the height of optimism. The width of the gulf between them is the measure of the value of the doctrine of the *Fall*.

On his own premises the Buddhist is perfectly right. He has, and can have, no hope of conquering sin. His only prospect is to escape it by annihilating his individual personality. Give up the belief that we are *A Fallen Race*, and what hope is there in or for the world? Accept the view that we are *fallen*, and there is no room for despair. For what has fallen may always be redeemed, that is to say, it may be restored to the place from which it fell. But if we have not *fallen* the Sin which we detect within ourselves, which ravages everything about us, has always been an essential part of our nature. How then can we hope to get rid of it as long as we exist?

E. *The Flood.*

There are many obvious difficulties in the way of treating this story as a piece of literal history.

1. If the flood had really covered the whole earth, so that the highest mountains were submerged, it would mean that the globe had been covered with an envelope of water some six miles in depth. A body of water so vast could never have drained away, because the existing oceans could not possibly have received it.

2. The dimensions of the Ark are carefully given, and are less than those of many modern ships. It could not have contained two specimens of every known species of animal, together with sufficient food for them for a period of several months.

3. The Bible places the Flood in what are (geologically) very modern times. We know that the surface of the earth was then much as it is now. The boundaries of oceans and continents were apparently those with which we are familiar. How could the animals which are now found in Australia or America only have made their way thither from Western Asia?

Some people may consider that these difficulties can be met by saying that God worked the necessary miracles. But His revelation of Himself to us leads us to think that He is not pleased to work miracles of this kind.

It has been argued that belief in one universal deluge is supported by world-wide tradition. But this is not the case. Flood-stories are found in Europe, Western Asia, and in parts of America. In Eastern Asia they seem to be unknown. Where they exist in Africa, they are probably due to Christian teaching. The unhistorical character of the Bible story was confirmed by the discovery some forty years ago of

the Babylonian version. The Babylonian Flood-story is much older than Genesis, and a comparison of the two leaves little room for doubt that the author of Genesis derived his story from it. The correspondence in one or two points of detail is so close as to make it possible that the Hebrew writer had the older version before him as he worked.

The Babylonian story is one episode in a long epic poem dealing with the achievements of the national hero Marduk. The gods decide to destroy by flood Shurippak, a city on the Euphrates. But one of them divulges the plot to his favourite, who is thereby enabled to build a boat and to escape.

It is quite possible, in fact probable, that this story is founded on fact. The flat country through which the Tigris and Euphrates flow must always have been as liable to become flooded from time to time as it is to-day. An exceptionally severe inundation, accompanied by unusual loss of life, may well have been remembered long afterwards, and might well be made to furnish material for an episode in the legendary career of Babylon's national hero.[1]

What then is the value of the Bible story? If the author of Genesis 6-9 has merely copied a Babylonian poem, why should we attach any particular importance to what he wrote? Must not any inspiration which may be claimed for the story belong to the original rather than to the copy?

It is impossible to appreciate the difference between the two versions unless we have them side

[1] Much as the great storm of 1703 furnished Addison with an appropriate simile for his poetical eulogy of the Duke of Marlborough.

by side. But no one can compare them carefully without noticing a wide difference of tone.

In the Babylonian story the gods act in a spirit of wanton mischief. They decide to destroy Shurippak for fun, and the surviving mortal owes his escape to treachery in their ranks.

In the Hebrew version the Flood is from first to last a moral judgment. It is sent upon the earth because of human wickedness. Noah is forewarned because of his righteousness. He is allowed to escape, because he deserves to do so. The atmosphere is altogether different.

The material of the story does not matter so much as the way in which it is told. The source from which it has been derived is of less importance than the conclusion to which it points.

We might have two pictures of the same subject, of the same size, framed in the same way. They might be painted on precisely similar pieces of canvas, and there might be nothing to choose between the quality of the pigments used. But one might be a great work of art, which any collection would be proud to possess, whilst its fellow might be a valueless daub. The difference would be due to the difference between the artists themselves.

The author of Genesis 6-9 was convinced that there was a real difference between Right and Wrong, and that it is a difference which God regards. He used an old story to illustrate his conviction that the government of the world is not arbitrary, but is based upon ascertainable moral principles.

There are still many people who doubt or deny this. Three thousand years ago it might with more

justice have been regarded as an open question. What can we say of a man who with much less evidence before him than we possess had no doubt that the Power which directs the course of events is a moral one, except that he was *Inspired?* What should we expect to be the effect of inspiration upon a writer if not that it imparts a peculiar and distinctive tone to what he writes?

*It all depends upon how the story is told.*

F. *The Tower of Babel.*

This is merely an attempt to account for existing differences of which the writer was aware.[1] He may have known that Babylonia was the original home of the racial family to which he and his nearest neighbours belonged. He may have visited Babylon itself, and have seen its stupendous buildings. In any case, he must have known of them by repute. They were characteristic of the great immoral power which the Hebrews had good reason to fear. In Hebrew eyes the towers of Babylon, which would have been beyond their own powers of construction, were natural symbols of a pride and insolence which knew no bounds, upon which God's judgment must surely fall.

Thus the story is an attempt to account for the migrations of the various Semitic stocks and for the fact that their languages had come to differ. The dispersion from their original home was ancient history when Genesis was written. As the story is told, it is coloured by a conviction that human pride

[1] As in the story of the Flood "*the whole earth*" must be understood to mean that part of the world with which the writer and the readers whom he contemplated were directly concerned. Cf. St. Luke 2. v. 1; Acts 17. v. 6.

may be carried to lengths which are intolerable in the sight of God.

G. *The Early Patriarchs.*

A minor point, which may be worth a word of comment, arises in connection with the ages ascribed to the Patriarchs in chapters 5 and 11.

It is not necessary to regard these as in any sense historical, or to try to explain them by assuming that the *years* were some period of time much shorter than our years. The two tables, *The Book of the Generations of Adam* and *The Generations of Shem* are plainly artificial. The Jews reckoned time, as they do now, from what they believed to be the date of the creation of the world. The authors of these chapters wished to provide complete genealogies of an official kind for Noah and for Abraham. It may not be clear to us why they should have thought it worth while to do so. But in Jewish eyes such matters were important.[1]

There were certain traditional names of Patriarchs between Adam and Noah, and again between Noah and Abram. These had to be made to cover a certain period, and the age of each individual had to be amplified as requisite. We need not assume any foundation in fact for them at all. In modern European eyes such a proceeding may seem dishonest. But it would not have struck any Jew in that light. Probably it would not so strike any Oriental now.

[1] Cf. the legal ancestry provided for Our Lord in St. Matt. 1. and St. Luke 3. In each case it is the ancestry of Joseph, and is therefore to our thinking altogether beside the point. Its presence is the more remarkable as these are the two Gospels which state that He was not Joseph's Son.

The editor of Genesis regarded it as merely one of the duties of an editor to provide such tables. Without them his book would be incomplete, and that consideration overrode any other.

Literary convention had to be satisfied, and it makes no difference to religion whether Methusaleh lived to be nine hundred and sixty-nine or not.

The point is trivial, and the editor of Genesis did not in all probability imagine that anyone would ever attach much importance to it.

But it is worth noting as an illustration of the difference between the ancient Hebrew and modern English points of view.

With Abram we come to what may be counted the beginning of distinctively Hebrew history. We pass out of the region of myths common to all the Semitic races, and begin the story of one particular branch. At the beginning of Chapter 12 the atmosphere changes completely. From this point onwards we are dealing with the history of one people. It may prove to be no more accurate and complete than are other early histories. But that it is meant to be read primarily as history there can be no question. And we need not doubt that the narrative has at least an historical foundation.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BOOKS OF MOSES (*Continued*)

At the end of the eleventh chapter of Genesis we pass into a new atmosphere. We have left primitive myth and allegory behind, and have come to what is intended to be read as history.

The remaining thirty-nine chapters of the book cover four generations—from the birth of Abram to the death of his great-grandson, Joseph.

Even if these chapters were by the hand of Moses, they deal with what would have been ancient history at the time of writing. On their own showing, the interval between Abram and Moses is not less than five hundred years. As a matter of fact, it is probable that they did not receive their present form until at least a thousand years after the events which they describe. They are the work of more than one man, and we can say nothing about the sources from which the authors may have drawn their information.

It is unlikely that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob carried about with them libraries of burnt-brick such as were accumulated by the Babylonians. And it is at least doubtful whether they were acquainted with any other form of writing material.

When the story, as we have it now, came to be written down, the authors probably had very little before them in the shape of documents to which they could refer. If any did exist, they were in all probability not contemporary.[1]

Accordingly, we must remember that while we are reading what purports to be history, it is history into which an element of legend is likely to have crept. It is impossible to say now exactly how large this element may be.

The memories of people who make little or no use of writing are more tenacious than our own. Amongst them oral tradition is commonly more accurate than it is amongst ourselves. But it is unlikely that oral tradition would remain absolutely accurate for a period of a thousand years. It could not, unless we adopt an extremely mechanical theory of inspiration for which the Bible itself gives no warrant whatever.

We are not entitled to assume that twenty-five generations of Hebrews were endowed with supernaturally infallible memories, or that the authors of our Genesis had historical information of which everyone else was ignorant supernaturally imparted to them. Our only reason for asserting anything of the kind would be a determination to make the narrative fit our ideas of what it ought to be.

We have, however, come to attach more weight to tradition than the generation before us did. For

[1] It may be worth while to point out in passing that the circumstances under which the New Testament was written are in no way parallel. The question of the historical accuracy of the New Testament is on a footing entirely different from that of the Old.

example, the poems of Homer have passed through much the same process as the Old Testament has done. Former views as to their date and authorship have been discarded, and they have been analyzed into a number of different elements derived from different sources. But latterly somewhat more conservative views have reasserted themselves. No one doubts now that there is a very solid substratum of history behind Homer's account of the Trojan War.

The war really took place, though we do not regard as facts all the names assigned to the champions on either side, nor all the particular exploits attributed to them.

Similarly, we need not doubt that there is a solid substratum of history behind the stories of the Patriarchs. But Genesis is not history written from the modern standpoint, and we could not expect it to be.

It is history written by, and primarily for, people in whose eyes details of fact have no particular importance. An ancient Hebrew would have seen no value in the sort of historical accuracy which we have come to prize. He would not recognize the force of the standards which we apply when judging a historical work.

In him the dramatic instinct is uppermost. His first object is to tell an effective story, which may serve to illustrate some point which he desires to impress. For this purpose he will lay hold of any available material which seems to be suitable, and will cast it into the requisite shape.

As historians of this type the authors of Genesis were supremely successful. Where can we find stories

more vivid and better told than in the lives of the Patriarchs?

Abraham has always stood as a type of faith and courage both for his readiness to leave his ancestral home, *not knowing whither he went*, and for his willingness to sacrifice the son upon whom the fulfilment of God's promise to him depended. We could not find a better means of teaching children that God expects men to trust Him without qualification or reserve.

As long as impatience tempts us to sacrifice everything for some trifling, immediate advantage the story of how Esau sold his birthright will never become obsolete. We must all feel that we should have missed something if we had never heard of Joseph and his brethren.

"But," it may be urged, "all this is beside the point. Granted that the last thirty-nine chapters of Genesis are, with certain exceptions, extremely edifying: granted that as literature they reach a very high level. Are they true, as we understand true history? If not, is not at least nine-tenths of their value gone?"

To ask—*Are they true?* seems to most of us a natural and vital question. But it is in fact somewhat irrelevant. We cannot determine exactly how far they are what *we* understand by history. But they are what the people who wrote them valued and understood by history. And if we regard those people as inspired, we shall probably gain more by trying to understand their conception of the way in which history should be written than by finding fault with it for not being the same as our own.

In these chapters we have a record of the view which the Hebrews took of what they knew of their own early history. They had traditions of a time when they were not a distinct people; they realised that they had become a separate nation by migration from their original home.

The story of the migration is told as if it were the history of a single family. In reality it was probably upon a larger scale. Tribes or clans are spoken of as if they were individuals, and hostile feeling between kindred clans is treated as a family quarrel. Such personification is quite natural, and enables a story to be cast into more dramatic form. The Bible sometimes speaks of the nation at a much later period of its history as if it were an individual, *e.g. When Israel was a child then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.*[1]

Such personification of tribes or clans is common and obvious in Genesis. But it is sometimes forgotten by critics that all movements must have a personal leader. And his name is precisely the kind of detail which may be accurately preserved by tradition. Abraham and Jacob, at least, may well be the genuine names of leaders of successive stages of the migration of the Hebrew clans. Isaac is perhaps more shadowy. He may have been inserted to fill a gap which had to be bridged.

Personally I doubt whether the principal actors in any traditional story are ever entirely imaginary. Legend may gather round them, and minor characters may be invented to act as foils.

But unless there is strong evidence to the contrary

[1] Hosea 11. 1.

we are, I believe, justified in regarding the outstanding characters of any traditional story as, at bottom, historical personages.

Abraham is probably more 'historical' than Lot. The story of Lot's wife may be no more than an attempt to account for some curious natural formation.

The elder sons of Jacob are also shadowy. Their part in the story is principally to act as foils to Joseph, and the fact that they give their names to tribes obliges us to look upon them with suspicion.

A primitive community often invents what is called "an eponymous ancestor" to account for the name which it bears. And when neighbouring clans, which know themselves to be blood relations, bear different names, they very commonly declare that they are descended from brothers.

When the Greeks became conscious of themselves as consisting of three tribes—Hellenes, Dorians, and Ionians, they asserted that they were the descendants of three brothers named Hellen, Dorus, and Ion. It is more than likely that the elder sons of Jacob owe their existence to the same process. The fact that they were not all by the same mother further suggests that we are dealing with an attempt to account for the origin of kindred, but somewhat different tribes.

Joseph, who possesses more character than any of the others, did not give his name to a tribe. There were no *Josephites*, but two tribes were named after his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. It is also in favour of regarding Abraham and Jacob as real people that no tribes were called by their names.

In the stories of the Patriarchs we have an account of the early migrations of the people who were afterwards known as the Hebrews. No doubt the outline of the story is historically accurate. Their original home was Babylonia, from which they moved to the south-west into Canaan. After a short pause they moved on under stress of famine to Egypt. They returned again to Canaan; and after a somewhat longer period were once more driven by famine into the more fertile land of Egypt, where an advance-guard of their own race was already established. The Egyptians then allowed them to settle permanently as herdsmen.

The names of the leaders of the successive stages of their wanderings may have been accurately preserved. The story of Joseph may well be founded on fact, though it is possible that he was by no means the only nomad Semite who was sold into Egypt as a slave and subsequently did well there. It is also quite likely that experience of former settlers of the same stock led the Egyptians to give to the *house of Jacob* a welcome which they had withheld from *Abraham* before.[1]

The value of these stories lies not in the historical information which they impart, but in the way in which they are told. That is of much greater importance than the details of the narrative. The history of the early Hebrew migrations might be interesting. But the bare facts could not be vital to religion now.

1. The narrative is marked throughout by a very clear appreciation of moral values. We continually

[1] Gen. ch. 12. v. 20, cf. ch. 26. v. 2.

meet the conviction that Right and Wrong are entirely different, and that the difference between them is of the greatest moment.

Pharaoh [1] and Abimelech [2] both regard the marriage tie as inviolable. The natural cataclysm which overwhelmed the Cities of the Plain is not treated as an inexplicable incident which might have happened anywhere. It is the deliberate judgment of God upon exceptional wickedness. If ten righteous men could have been found in Sodom it would not have fallen.[3]

Joseph refuses the request of Potiphar's wife on the ground of abstract Right and Wrong.[4] In the eyes of most Orientals the attitude which he took up would appear ridiculous and unintelligible.

The sense that certain things are in the abstract wrong, and that therefore no more need be said about them, is not diminished by the fact that the conduct of the characters does not reach a Christian level. We are bound to condemn Jacob's dealings, both with Esau and with Laban. But successful duplicity seems always to appeal to the Oriental mind. The wonderful thing is not that Jacob should sometimes have acted as he did, but that any of the characters should have held that there is such a thing as *sin against God*, which is to be regarded with horror and avoided at any cost.

It is a view of life which even now is by no means universal in England. When conscience hints that we have allowed moral issues to be obscured by prudent considerations, and that our moral backbone needs stiffening, there is no tonic to be found

[1] Ch. 12. [2] Ch. 20. [3] Ch. 18-19. [4] Ch. 39.

comparable with that which these and similar vivid stories of the Bible provide.

2. More striking still is the overwhelming sense of Divine purpose. God is never left out of account for a moment.

Abram left his home in obedience to a Divine command.[1] God promised him an heir[2] when all hope of issue seemed to be past. And Jacob found that even in the hour of his flight he was not forgotten of God nor beyond His reach.[3]

It is unnecessary to quote further instances. No one can read the stories without seeing that the writers were convinced that God has always been revealing Himself in human history and shaping the course of events according to His will. Men can never forget that they are always entirely dependent upon Him. If they try, it will be forced upon their notice.

Of course the picture is idealized. But the men who drew it could not have drawn it had they not been profoundly conscious of God in their own lives. They were certain that they and all their countrymen were, and always had been since they became a separate people, in a unique relation to God; and they were accustomed to trace His hand in everything which happened.

In view of the part which the Hebrew race, though quite insignificant in numbers and far behind many other ancient peoples in the ordinary arts of civilization, has played in the world, we cannot challenge their belief. To say the least—it provides an intelligible explanation for what would otherwise be inexplicable.

[1] Ch. 12. [2] Ch. 18. [3] Ch. 28.

The Hebrews could not have done what they have done if they had not been inspired by the conviction that they had a unique national destiny to fulfil. Can we dismiss as ill-founded an idea which has, in fact, produced such astonishing results? What more conclusive proof of genuineness does the nature of the case admit? Naturally they believed, and we are not in a position to say that they were mistaken, that the same sense of Divine Guidance and National Destiny must have existed at the very beginning of their history. When they set themselves to record what they knew of their earliest days, they aimed at giving expression to this belief.

Genesis shews us what a later age felt that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must have been because of what it knew itself to be. Or, if we prefer so to put it, how a later age used Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to illustrate its interpretation of history.

It is not quite the way in which we set ourselves to write history now. But it was the way in which the ancient Hebrews did. And it would be rash to assert that our method would have served their purpose better than their own, or that it would have been of greater value to the world at large. If we count the writers of the Bible inspired, we must defer to their judgment as to the way in which it ought to be written.

Moreover, can we maintain that the interpretation which Genesis puts upon what the later Hebrews knew of their own early history is not true?

If the people whom Abraham represents had never left Haran, but had been content to dwell *beyond the river* and to *worship other gods* as their fathers had

done, there would never have been any Hebrew nation at all. Or, if soon after their migration they had been absorbed by any of their more numerous and powerful neighbours, the Hebrew nation would have passed out of existence. It would mean no more to us or to anybody else than the Perizzites or Girgashites do to-day.

If the Hebrew nation had never been born, or if after a brief separate existence it had been absorbed by some other people, the course of history would have been very different. All Christians would say without hesitation that the whole world would have sustained an irreparable loss.

In view of the issues depending upon the preservation and independence of one small clan, outwardly not differing in any way from a dozen others, can we doubt that their migration was by the will of God? Nothing could have made and kept them distinct save an overpowering sense of unique National Destiny. The spiritual consequences of that issue have been so far-reaching that we cannot but say that it must have been implanted by God.

The *Call of Abraham* must indeed be a fact, and it may be that only one personal leader heard it. What account of the national consciousness which sustained the little band of immigrants into a land which was not theirs can be given better than the story of a Covenant between God and Abraham, and of the promise repeated to Isaac and Jacob?

If God did ever make a Covenant with any people, what else could we expect to be the outcome in their lives? What could a Covenant between God and man mean if not something like that?

If we confine our attention to the historical details of the stories, we may be inclined to dismiss them as of doubtful value. But then we are reading them from our own standpoint. We are applying a test whose validity the authors would not have recognized, and finding objections which they would have dismissed as of no weight.

They are concerned with the interpretation of the material before them rather than with the material itself. If we make anything else our chief concern when reading their works we are blind to the purpose with which they wrote.

If we like to challenge their interpretation we can. But if so, we must be prepared to offer a better.

Between the end of Genesis and the opening of Exodus there is an interval of something like four hundred years. The Bible narrative passes over this period in almost complete silence. It provides us with nothing but a very short summary.

The Israelites (as they may now be called) multiplied rapidly. The Egyptians became afraid of them and enslaved them. Not content with that, a systematic attempt was made to keep down their numbers, and to diminish the risk of a rebellion by putting male children to death at birth.

Whatever may have been the exact circumstances of Moses' escape, there is no reason to question the main outline of the story or to doubt that he was adopted by a member of the Royal family and brought up at Pharaoh's court. Eventually he determined to throw in his lot with his own people, and to remove them from Egypt altogether. In this undertaking he was successful.

It is impossible for us to imagine what the history of the world would have been if he had failed.

Yet the odds were overwhelmingly against him. The Pharaoh had every reason for wishing to keep his slaves. How can we describe the courage and resolution which Moses needed, save as a Divine Inspiration given to support obedience to a Divine call?

Perhaps we do not always do justice to the Vision which sent him upon his mission, when his request that he might know the Divine Name, received the answer "I AM THAT I AM," or, as is suggested in the Revised Version, "I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE."[1] We may pass over the words as altogether mysterious, without seeing how far their meaning reaches.

1. They are not a name at all.

A name is essentially descriptive. It is, or was, always an attempt to depict the character of the person to whom it belongs. It invests him with certain attributes—to the exclusion of others which he might conceivably possess. It marks his limitations. Heathen religion is always accustomed to label its deities, and these labels define their characters and spheres of action. Each god or goddess has his own functions, with which none of his colleagues must interfere. But outside them he cannot go. And they are indissolubly bound up with the name or title which he bears. No sooner has the name been pronounced than the thoughts of all who hear it are directed to one particular channel.

But the Lord God of the Hebrews is not to be

[1] Ex. ch. 3.

spoken of in this fashion. He cannot (be it said with all reverence) be indexed and catalogued like Thoth or Pasht, Apollo or Artemis. His Nature can only be described in terms of Itself. With Him ordinary language is useless, because to Him ordinary, conventional standards and ideas do not apply. There was no *Name* which could be revealed to Moses. If there had been, the content of the revelation would have been immeasurably less.

2. If the alternative suggested by the Revised Version be accepted all that has been said in the previous paragraph holds good. But something further is added to it. If when we would describe God in human speech we can only say that *He will be what He will be*, it is an acknowledgment that our conception of Him is incomplete. There is more to be revealed than has been revealed yet, and how much more we cannot say.

To use technical terms, it gives us a conception of God which is Dynamic, not Static, and a religion which so conceives its God is capable of indefinite growth. It need never become outworn and incapable of keeping pace with its worshippers.

That is where the Hebrew religion was superior to its rivals. Some of them may have produced a more exquisite art and a more profound philosophy. The religions of Egypt and Greece were the foundations of much more elaborate civilizations. But at the best their ideas were fixed, and therefore dead. It was only a question of time before this became obvious.

That was in fact what happened. Gradually their adherents outgrew them and came to perceive that if they were not morally superior to their own

gods they might be, and most certainly ought to be. But when the followers of a religion are compelled to feel ashamed of the immemorial objects of their worship, that religion cannot stand.

It is common now to speak contemptuously of the early religion of the Hebrews as *crude* and *barbarous*, and there is some justice in these criticisms. But the point to be kept in mind is not—What was it like when it began?, but—What did it come to be before it ended?

No doubt a comparison might be drawn between the religion which Moses practised in the wilderness and the religion which he had left behind in Egypt which might be made favourable in many respects to the latter. But it is like comparing a healthy naked infant with a Royal Corpse.

The corpse may be richly robed and jewelled, and may be a very impressive sight. It may belong to a man who has achieved great things in the past. But they are past. The corpse can never be anything more than it is now, and will eventually be much less. The child may not appear to be much at present. He has achieved very little, but he has a future before him, and no one can say yet what it may be. He is unquestionably the more valuable of the two.

We cannot say when or by whom the third chapter of Exodus was put on paper. But we can say this. It gives us a conception of God which is at once unique and inexhaustible.

The insight which avoided the ordinary error of limiting God by means of some descriptive title had one immediate purpose—to inspire Moses for the apparently hopeless task which he had to undertake.

He needed a larger conception of the Divine Nature than he or anyone else had ever possessed before, because his prospect of success in his audacious enterprise depended upon his belief in the unique sufficiency of God.

He was successful, for if any event in past history can be considered certain, it is certain that Moses led Israel out of Egypt. How are we to account for his success unless we admit that he did somehow receive the inspiration which he needed? If he had not learned more of God than he knew before, he must have failed.

The conception of God contained in the third chapter of Exodus sets a unique stamp upon the religion of Israel. A faith which refuses to limit its God, and admits that its present conception of Him is incomplete, contains a seed of future growth to which other religions, which pride themselves upon their completeness, can make no claim.

Now if God were ever to reveal Himself to man what sort of effect could the revelation be expected to produce? We should expect it to lead to a conception of the Divine Nature larger than anything which had gone before it. And that is what the story of the *Burning Bush* gives us. We do not know when or by whom it was written down. But that does not matter. The words are there, for anyone to read who will. And the more we ponder the meaning of *I AM hath sent me unto you*,[1] and reflect upon all that has flowed from it, the more impossible does it become to doubt that in these words we are listening to the Voice of God Himself.

[1] Ch. 3. v. 14.

The escape from Egypt was a great crisis in the history of the nation. It could never be forgotten, and it is therefore likely that a certain amount of legend has gathered round it.

It may be possible to find *natural* explanations for all the plagues of Egypt, and even for such occurrences as the Manna,[1] and the fetching of water out of the rock.[2] That makes no difference to the value of the story.[3] If we believe in a God who is the Creator and sustainer of everything in heaven and on earth, an event is not the less an act of His because we are able to *explain* it, *i.e.* because we can perceive the chain of circumstances which led up to it. An occurrence does not cease to be divine if the process by which it is brought about can be grasped by the faculties with which God has endowed us.

Similarly, something which is inexplicable in our eyes is not the more divine on that account. What we ordinarily mean by *miracles* are not the only, or even the principal, channels by which the power of God may be manifested. What is counted *miraculous* by one age may cease to be so regarded by another. But that does not make it any less His doing. To insist on miracles as proofs of God's presence and power is not the mark of a very deep or vigorous faith. We are living closer to Him if we can see His hand in all that happens whether what happens admits of a *natural explanation* or not.

What happens to us is of less spiritual moment than the attitude which we take up towards it. The attitude which we adopt is what makes the difference

[1] Ex. ch. 16, etc. [2] Numbers ch. 20.

[3] What follows applies to Old Testament miracles generally.

between a religious and an irreligious man. Two men may go through exactly the same experience. But the effect upon their characters may be entirely different. One may have his faith in God deepened and strengthened, the other may be hardened in worldliness and profanity.

The exact details of the escape of the Israelites from Egypt, and of their subsequent wanderings, are only of secondary importance. The record which we possess now did not take its present shape until long after the events with which it deals, and it is clearly a compilation by several unknown hands.

But the vital point is this. When in after years the Israelites looked back upon the greatest crisis of their national history they were sure that they could never have won through it without the help of God. Again and again disaster must have overtaken them if He had not stood by them, and when the story of their adventures was placed on record it was told in the light of this belief. The Exodus stamped upon them the conviction—*For this God is our God for ever and ever, He shall be our Guide unto death.*[1]

When we consider how much depended upon their success, and how many dangers they had to run before their independence (or even their national existence) could be secured, we cannot regard their conviction as ill-founded or exaggerated. The actual narrative is contained in the books Exodus and Numbers, and is in outline as follows:

The Israelites escaped from Egypt, and an attempt on the part of the Egyptians to recapture them failed. Having got clear away, they marched to Mount Sinai,

[1] Ps. 48. v. 14.

where Moses received from God the Moral Law known as *The Ten Commandments*. Immediately after this are three chapters [1] devoted to social legislation, in which a noticeable feature is the recognition of slavery as an established institution. Moses then reascends the mountain and receives detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle (or movable Tent-Temple for the worship of God), and for the appointment of a Priesthood to serve it.

While he was in the mountain the people relapsed into idolatry. Inspired, doubtless, by recollections of Egyptian practices, they made themselves a god in the form of a Golden Calf. Aaron, the brother of Moses, who was destined to be the first priest of the Tabernacle, lent himself to this proceeding.

After this the camp at Sinai was struck, and the rest of the book deals with the construction of the Tabernacle and of the garments for the Priests.

In Numbers narrative and legislation alternate very regularly. The outstanding incidents are the dedication of the completed Tabernacle [2] and the ordering of the functions of the priestly tribe of Levi, the sedition of Miriam and Aaron,[3] the contemplated return of the people to Egypt,[4] and the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.[5] The book ends with the Israelites upon the frontier of the Promised Land at the end of forty years' wandering in the wilderness. Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh are already established upon the eastern side of Jordan.

[1] Ch. 21-23. [2] Chs. 7 and 8. [3] Ch. 12.

[4] Ch. 14. The proposal was due to the discouraging report brought by the Spies.

[5] Ch. 16.

Now, as soon as we begin to study these two books certain points emerge.

1. *The narrative is extraordinarily frank.*

There is no attempt to idealize the Israelites as a whole. They are repeatedly represented as having lost heart, and as having regretted that they ever left Egypt. There are two rebellions against Moses' authority, and two downright lapses into idolatry of a gross kind.

Few historians can have made less attempt to conceal the discreditable episodes of their early national history.

2. *The place accorded to the Moral Law.*

(a) It is absolute, resting on the immediate personal authority of God Himself.

(b) It comes at the earliest possible moment. As soon as the Israelites have made their escape and have tasted what freedom means, they proceed to Sinai and receive the Law without delay.

(c) It precedes all other legislation, and is treated as the foundation upon which everything else is to be carried.

The Israelites are not represented as having evolved some sort of moral code to meet the existing requirements of their social life. They are said to have begun with a moral code by which the character of their social life was to be determined. That is the teaching of Exodus, that all human intercourse must rest upon absolute and eternal moral principles: all legislation must be a conscious effort to express and apply those principles effectively.

This view of life is endorsed by every Christian conscience to-day, and if universally accepted would turn the whole world upside down. It is familiar to us now. But the man through whom it was first imparted to the Israelites must indeed have been alone with God. They were right in thinking that God had spoken to him *as a man speaketh with his friend*. The setting of the revelation is unimportant. The point is that it came, otherwise the twentieth chapter of Exodus could not have been written.

It has been said above that the record which we have now of what happened in the wilderness is obviously a compilation by several hands. What we have before us is the tradition which was accepted by a later age. We need not question the historical character of its main outlines. Its religious value to us now is not in any of the details which it records, but in the overwhelming sense of Divine Guidance and Authority by which it is marked throughout.

Without going into technical points, which could not be appreciated without a knowledge of the Hebrew language, the fact that the story is composite is shewn by the legislation which it records. While *The Law* contains some very primitive elements, much of it implies a settled and fairly civilized state of society,[1] far in advance of anything possible in the wilderness. Much of the *Mosaic Law* would have been unintelligible and useless if it had really proceeded from the mouth of Moses himself.

At one time this contention might have been met by saying that it was given prophetically. Granted that much of it could not apply in the wilderness, it

[1] The contrast is most noticeable in Leviticus.

was nevertheless given then in anticipation of the time when it would be needed.

If people have made up their minds to regard Inspiration and Prophecy in that light, it is unlikely that any argument will ever shake them. We can only say that the more we learn of God's methods the more certain do we feel that He does not work in that kind of way. He does not dictate details, thereby saving us from all trouble and responsibility. Even less does He give instructions which are necessarily useless at the time in anticipation of the day when it will be possible to give effect to them. He leads men on step by step in accordance with their needs and capacities at the moment. He does not atrophy their powers, but fosters their growth.

Much of the legislation, both religious and civil, which appears in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers is much later than the period to which it purports to belong. It represents what has become the established practice of the Jews at some time before this part of the Bible received its present shape.

It is not difficult to see why the whole body of the Law came eventually to be ascribed to Moses himself.

(1) He was the founder of the Jewish State, and therefore whatever came to form part of the Law by which it lived might with propriety be fathered upon him. He was the original author of the system which gave birth to many later developments. The entire growth might in a sense be counted the work of the man who had planted the original seed.

In our eyes this view may seem misleading. But the arrangement is not of our making, and was not

designed primarily for our benefit. We can only say that in the eyes of the people who made it, it seemed to be natural and appropriate.

(2) A desire to enhance the sacredness and importance of the Law by claiming for it all the highest possible antiquity.

To us such a proceeding may savour of dishonesty. It seems to be an attempt to invest existing practices with an authority which does not really belong to them. But if the whole Law were regarded as Divine its importance could not really be enhanced by the personality of the human medium through whom it came.

We are not called to pass judgment upon the Bible from our own particular standpoint. It is we who are upon trial when we read it. Our business is not to criticize the way in which it has been written, but to try to understand what the writers meant to teach, and their reason for writing as they did.

If there is anything of value to be learned from the Old Testament, we must believe that we are meant to learn it from the books as we have received them. We may regret the fact that we do not possess full and contemporary records of the days of Moses. They would doubtless be extremely interesting. But would their *religious* value be any greater than the value of the records which we do possess?

If we believe that the Hebrews were in any sense *The Chosen People*, if we believe the Bible to be in any sense *Inspired*, we cannot find fault with the fact that it has not been written in the way in which we think it ought to have been.

We should not ascribe to Moses legislation which

we know to be much later than his date. But if the Jews did so, as is beyond question, we have got to take that fact into account. It can only shake our faith if we have brought to our reading of the Bible certain fixed notions of our own making as to what it ought to be. But that is not faith at all. Indeed, it is an attitude of mind which seems to come perilously near deliberate resistance to the Holy Spirit. If He is to guide us into all truth, we must for our part be ready to follow His leading. The truth into which He leads us may prove to be very unlike what we had expected. But we cannot for that reason refuse to recognize it.

If we believe in a Divine Purpose for the whole world, first manifested in the House of Israel and then transferred in a vastly expanded form to the Christian Church, we must believe that what God has put into our hands is better calculated to promote that purpose than anything else could be.

Much of the book Leviticus is of less importance than many parts of the Bible. It consists of legislation, principally of a ceremonial kind, with which the Christian reader is not directly concerned.

But the sacrificial system set forth there is not without its interest and value. It throws a good deal of light upon the Jewish attitude towards religion, and for purpose of study its date is unimportant. It may be primitive or late, or it may be a mixture of primitive and later elements. We can take it as it stands at its face value.

Briefly, it shews that Jewish religious practice consisted very largely of elaborate symbolic representation. If we like, we may call it *make-believe*. It

would take too long to go into details here, but if we read the ritual of the *sin-offerings* carefully, we can see that they were all elaborate parables of action. The culminating point was the ceremony of the scapegoat once a year upon the day of Atonement.[1]

The point of all these ceremonies was to shew in vivid and dramatic fashion, by means of symbolic action, that sin is something horrible which must be utterly put away. It is even implied that the life of the sinner is forfeit to God, and can only be redeemed by the offer of another (that of an animal) in his stead. The whole system is an appeal through the eye to the conscience of the spectator, an attempt to bring him to repent of his sins and to lead a new life entirely dedicated to God.

To us the system may seem cumbrous. We are not accustomed to acted parables. But the Jews were, as appears from time to time in the Prophets, notably in Ezekiel.[2] They relied more upon the eye and less upon the ear than we do as a means of receiving instruction, and it may well be that their sin-offerings stirred many a conscience which could not have been reached by our methods. They had a genuine moral purpose which distinguishes them from the ordinary pagan sacrifice. In other hands sacrifice was little but an attempt to bribe God, or to exploit Him for the worshipper's private ends.

And the history of the system has a lesson which we cannot afford to ignore. We believe that it was shaped under Divine Guidance to move men to repentance and to rouse them to fresh battle with

[1] Ch. 16.

[2] *E.g.* ch. 4; ch. 5. v. 1-11; ch. 12. v. 1-7.

their sins. But it became perverted, and the perversion was the ruin of the Jewish Church. Attention came to be fixed upon the outward act and its meaning was ignored. It came to be thought that the sacrifice had in itself cleansing power,[1] and the need of any moral change in the worshipper was passed over. The setting of the call to repentance became all in all, until the fact that it was and could be nothing but a call to repentance was entirely forgotten. What was ordained to be an appeal to the conscience became a substitute for conscience, until the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was obliged to say—*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin.*[2]

Of course it is impossible. But the fact that a very large majority of the Jews had come to think otherwise warns us of what is likely to befall any people who fail to use imagination in their religion, and allow the form in which spiritual teaching is conveyed to obscure the teaching itself.

The book Deuteronomy is of a somewhat different character. The title, like Genesis and Exodus, is taken from the Greek Bible, and means *The Second Law Giving*.

Except for the last chapter, which records the death of Moses, it adds very little to the history contained in the books which precede it.

It consists principally of a recapitulation of the

[1] I am speaking exclusively of the sacrifices of the Old Testament. No reference to the *Sacrifice of the Death of Christ* is intended.

[2] Ch. 10. v. 4. Cf. also Ps. 50. The existence of the protest reveals the abuse.

events which have already taken place, and re-affirmation of the existing law. The Israelites are exhorted to cherish a thankful remembrance of what God has already done for them, and are warned of the penalties which disobedience to His commands must bring. At the same time various blessings are promised as a reward for obedience.

Then there is an exhortation to Joshua (Chapter 31) followed by two poems, *The Song of Moses* and *The Blessing of Moses*. With the exception of Chapter 34, the whole book is put into Moses' own mouth. But, as has been pointed out above, this need not mean that the Jews themselves always believed him to have been the author. It was not uncommon for later writers to ascribe their own compositions to one of the great figures of the past.[1] And as Deuteronomy might almost be described as *A Sermon on the Duty of Keeping the Law* it would seem natural to a Jew to put it into Moses' mouth. It is what Moses might have said.

There is no question that the book belongs to a period much later than the one to which it purports to belong. It presents certain parallels with the book of Jeremiah. The author had almost certainly read Jeremiah, and Deuteronomy must therefore be classed among the latest books of the Old Testament.[2] Its *prophecies* as to what will befall the Israelites after they have taken possession of the Promised Land are really *prophecies* after the event. They are only *prophetic* (in our sense of the word) inasmuch as what has happened once may be expected to happen

[1] See p. 38.

[2] It may not be earlier than the fifth century B.C.

again because the moral law is immutable. Disobedience to God's commandments has led to disaster, and always will. Obedience brings blessings, and so it will always be.

It may surprise many English readers of the Bible to hear that the book Deuteronomy is not what it professes to be: that it is not really Moses' final charge to his people, and that its *prophecies* are in fact meditations upon past history. In some eyes such statements may seem to be nothing less than an attempt to destroy its authority altogether.

I once heard a distinguished preacher refer to the attempts which had been made *to discredit the book of Deuteronomy*. He considered them to be reprehensible, and implied that they had been unsuccessful. If he meant that anyone has tried to prove it to be of little or no spiritual value he was right.

But if he meant that careful and scientific study of the book has not shewn that it belongs to a much later period than that of Moses, he was wrong. He had either refused to look at the evidence, or else was incapable of estimating its weight.

If religion be considered to have anything to do with truth, it is hard to see how any religious writing can be *discredited* by the discovery of anything relating to its origin and history. The more we know about it the better we are likely to understand it, and no one who really believes his religion can doubt that understanding and appreciation must grow together.

We are not concerned with the attitude which might be taken up by adherents of other faiths. There may be creeds which do not care to distinguish clearly between truth and falsehood. They may

prefer conclusions which seem likely to edify to a knowledge of the truth. But we who profess to be disciples of Him Who is The Truth cannot hold that there can be anything of permanent value in a mistake of any kind. If we have attributed a book to an author who did not in fact write it, the sooner we can correct our mistake the better. And if we regard the book in question as inspired, it is hard to see how the correction can possibly diminish its value.

Inspiration must depend upon contents more than upon authorship. If we lay claim to any powers of reason and judgment, it follows that we value a book for what it says more than for the author's name. If we consider that a book is *discredited* (which must mean that its value has been diminished or destroyed) by the fact that it was not written by a particular author it suggests that we have never really appreciated or understood it. Possibly we have chosen to read it in the light of some preconceived theory, or we may have taken it, as it were, at second-hand, relying entirely upon what other people have said about it. If we have said *this book must be inspired because it was written by Moses*, we have adopted a somewhat superficial point of view. It would shew more faith, and more of the spiritual discernment which is one of the rewards which God bestows on faith, if we were able to say—*The spiritual value to me of this book is so great that I must needs agree with the judgment which has pronounced it to be inspired.*

When our Lord was tempted of the Devil in the wilderness He availed Himself of the book of Deuteronomy.[1] At a great crisis in His life, when the fate

[1] St. Matthew, ch. 4. vv. 1-11; St. Luke, ch. 4. vv. 1-13.

of His Ministry was trembling in the balance, Deuteronomy was the Scripture which rose in His mind, and strengthened Him in His need. That has set the seal for ever upon its spiritual value. No higher tribute can ever be paid to any writing.

Nothing can by any possibility *discredit* in Christian eyes a book to which the Saviour of the World turned in time of trial.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EARLIER PROPHETS

The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and The Kings were called by the Jews the *Earlier Prophets.*

They cover the period from the entry of the Israelites into Canaan to the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, and the disappearance of the independent Hebrew State. We cannot fix the length of this period exactly, but it is probably between five and six hundred years.

If we were asked to find a descriptive title for these books we should label them *Historical.* We think of them as being first a record of events, and approach them from what might be called the historical standpoint.

That means that when we read them our centre of interest is for the most part in the facts which they relate, and we concern ourselves primarily with those facts as facts. We want to know what happened in the days of Jephthah, how Gideon routed the Midianites, what were the principal events of Uzziah's reign, and so on. And when we have ascertained the facts we are inclined to think that we have exhausted the value of the story.

But the Jew counted these books *Prophetic*, though

they have very little to do with *Prophecy*, as we generally understand the word. This shews that he approached them in a different spirit. To him the actual facts were not the main centre of interest. He looks deeper, to what lies behind them. In his eyes the importance of the facts lies not in what they are in themselves but in what they reveal, that is, in the light which they throw upon the Purpose of God.

One definite stage in that Purpose had been begun when Abram left his home in Haran; another had been completed when the Israelites had escaped from Egypt and had made their way across the great and terrible wilderness to the frontier of the Promised Land. The story of how they conquered and settled it belongs to a third stage. Now, history treated as a record of the unfolding of God's Purpose must possess a religious value whatever the actual facts which it records may be. In themselves they may be momentous or trivial, extraordinary or commonplace. The point is—What do they reveal to those who have eyes to see?

An exposition of the Divine Mind, whether in the form of a history of the past or a prediction of the future, was what a Jew understood by *Prophecy*. It is quite immaterial which form the exposition takes. Neither is more truly *prophetic* than the other.

The Prophet of the Old Testament is simply a person who declares the Mind of God. He may expound it from the events of the past, or he may see it expressed in the occurrences of his own day. Sometimes, though more rarely, his reading of the past and of the present indicates to him what God is likely to do in the future.

In modern language—His work is to emphasize the supreme importance of Moral Values, and to maintain that they are permanent under any conceivable circumstances. Right is always Right, because it is the Will of God. Wrong is always Wrong, because it is rebellion against Him. The nature of Right and Wrong is attested by the conscience which God has implanted in everyone. No discussion is needed to make the difference clear, because none but the wilfully blind can fail to see it.

Obedience to God will always be rewarded. Disobedience will always be punished by disaster. Any book which helps to make these truths plain is a *Prophecy* whether it bears upon the future or no.[1]

The books of Joshua and The Judges deal with the conquest and occupation of Canaan. They shew that the Israelites found the task to be one of great difficulty. The discouraging report originally brought by the Spies had not been without foundation.[2]

The Canaanites in all probability outnumbered the invaders, and surpassed them in all the arts of civilization. They only succumbed gradually before the attacks of a more virile stock which owed its superior vitality to its superior moral code.

The most formidable enemies whom the Israelites had to meet were, however, not strictly Canaanites, but the Philistines of the south-western seaboard. They were entirely different from the neighbouring tribes, and were apparently not a Semitic stock. There are some reasons for thinking that they were

[1] See further Chapters V. and VI. *The Later Prophets.*

[2] Numbers, ch. 13. vv. 31-33.

immigrants from Crete. If so, they were the heirs of a very splendid civilization.

The Bible story of this period is not contemporary history, and has doubtless undergone a certain amount of editing before it reached its existing shape. But it is noteworthy that there is no attempt to make out that the career of the Israelites was a series of unbroken triumphs.

They sustained many disastrous defeats. From time to time portions of the country reverted to the possession of the original owners, and the Israelite settlers became little better than slaves.[1] Then under the leadership of some able chieftain they recovered their independence. These chieftains are called *Judges*, and exercised the equivalent of royal power.

But their office was not hereditary, nor was there a continuous succession of them. An individual *Judge* was brought into being by some particular emergency. After he had dealt with it we generally read that *he judged Israel* (which in most cases probably means no more than his own particular neighbourhood) for the rest of his life. But after his death his place was not filled until some fresh crisis made it necessary.

The general picture which these books give is of a society bordering on absolute anarchy. If we changed the names and places we might be reading the history of almost any part of Western Europe during the sixth and seventh centuries when the strong hand of the Roman Empire was gone and a new world was in the making. The position is summed up in the very

[1] Judges, ch. 5. vv. 6-7, etc.

frank statement—*In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*[1]

As far as there was a government, it is what is called a Theocracy. That is to say, the Israelites were intended to regard God as their immediate and only King, and to live by His Laws only. As far as God had any visible representative on earth, he was to be found in the person of the priest who had charge of the Ark, wherever it might be. But any authority which the priest might possess was entirely moral. He had no force of any kind at his disposal.

The idea is the earliest instance of what may be called Reckless Idealism such as marked many theories of the Christian Middle Age. As a theory nothing could be nobler. But the Bible does not attempt to conceal the fact that in practice it did not work.

It would only have worked if the whole people had been inspired continuously with a very deep devotion to God, and with a vivid sense of His immediate Presence in their midst. But they were not. There were continual lapses into idolatry, which, if not universal, were upon a large scale.[2] This is not surprising; but each such lapse destroyed for the time being the whole theory upon which society was founded. It was much more disastrous than it would have been if the system of government had been more commonplace. Naturally the story of these years is a fierce and bloody one. If it were not, we should know that it could only be a work of fiction. As it is told, it rings true.

We hear of wars waged with the avowed object of

[1] Judges, ch. 17. v. 6. [2] Cf. Judges, ch. 6. vv. 25-32.

exterminating the enemies of Israel, of savage reprisals, and of many acts of private cruelty, treachery, and superstition.

Much ingenuity has been expended in trying to justify the conduct of the Israelites by Christian standards. It cannot be done, and there is no good reason for wishing to make the attempt. We are reading the early history of an Oriental people, surrounded by enemies with whom they had to fight for national existence. Christian ideals are still in the distant future. But the ethics of these books ought only to be a difficulty to those who have decided that because the whole Bible is *Inspired* it cannot be a record of any kind of progress, but that any part of it must bear the same relation to the Christian life as any other.

Yet the story is not merely a record of conquest, such as might be read elsewhere. It is pervaded by the sense of a Divine Purpose. It is God's Will that the House of Israel should increase, and be securely planted in the land which He had sworn to give them. Their struggles to preserve national existence and independence are not represented as being due solely to their own pride or ambition. They are part of the destiny which God has laid upon them, and are therefore invested with a sacred character. If Israel were to perish the credit of God would be irretrievably damaged, because His Promise would have been broken. Therefore they must maintain themselves as a distinct people, cost what it may. Better that any hostile tribe should be exterminated than that the Promise of God should fail. And because He has laid His destiny upon them, they may count upon

His help to fulfil it. People who are not Christians may question the justice of that standpoint now. But no one who reads the story can deny that it was their standpoint. Their conduct is not to be judged by any other.

Also, through the whole narrative runs a very keen appreciation of moral values. It never reaches the Christian level, but as far as it goes it is real. Certain lines of conduct are Righteous (though the conception of Righteousness is limited), and therefore need no apology. Other lines are sinful, and therefore admit of none. No attempt is made to conceal collective or individual moral lapses. There is repeated failure to live up to the ideal, but the ideal still remains.

In practice, however, the Theocracy did not work. The theory that God alone was the Immediate King of Israel, and that no earthly power was needed beyond the moral authority wielded by the priest in charge of the Ark was noble. But again and again urgent necessity compelled the appointment of a supplementary authority in the person of a *Judge* who did not hesitate to avail himself of physical force.

We cannot say exactly how long this period of occasional *Judges* lasted, but it was probably something like two centuries. At the end of that time we find the people desiring a King. They were at the moment under the heel of the Philistines.

Samuel, the High-priest of the Ark, was the ruler of Israel, and his position seems to have approached more nearly to that of a Monarch than had the position of any of his predecessors. He was the last of the

*Judges*, and must be accounted the greatest. Accordingly, it came to him to find the King.

It was recognized that the King's authority could only be derived from God, for he was to be avowedly God's Vice-gerent upon earth. But Samuel was the human instrument through which the choice was made. Acting under Divide Guidance, he selected a Benjamite named Saul, with the words—*Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be Captain over His inheritance?* [1]

The step was a retrograde one. It was avowedly a concession to political expediency. It meant the abandonment of the ideal that God Himself is the Sole, Personal, Immediate King of every Israelite. It could hardly fail to make the majority of the people think that God was now somehow further away than He used to be. The mere fact of the King's existence seemed to prove that God had become either incapable of exercising His own sovereignty or unwilling to do so.

Also, the establishment of a hereditary monarchy constituted Israel a normal State for the first time in its history. It obliterated one of the outstanding differences between the Israelites and all their neighbours. In numbers they were few, and their hold upon the Promised Land was not yet secure. There was always a very real danger that they might forget their distinctive calling. They might forget that they were a peculiar people, standing in a unique relation to God, with a unique mission to discharge. They might easily sink to be merely one amongst a number of insignificant Semitic tribes. Anything

[1] 1 Samuel, ch. 10. v. 1.

which might serve to emphasize their distinctive position was of value. Anything which, however remotely, tended to destroy it was to be feared and avoided as far as possible. This is the tenor of Samuel's speech.[1] He does not hesitate to call the demand for a King *sin*. He warns the people that their King may abuse his power, and that there will be no redress if he does so. It is a pathetic picture. The last and greatest of the Judges bowing to the inevitable, and conceding a demand which in his eyes amounts to a virtual renunciation of the ideal for which he had lived.

It is possible that the speech is not strictly historical. It is probable that the book of Samuel did not receive its present form until long after Samuel himself was dead, and the speech which has been put into his mouth may represent the reflections of some later writer rather than the words which were actually used at the time. But if this be so, it does not make the speech valueless. For it means that some later historian recognized that the institution of the Monarchy had been an abandonment of the highest national ideal. If we regard the Old Testament as a record of religious progress it is more important that a later generation should have recognized what had been involved by the institution of a King than that Samuel should have denounced it at the time. To many modern readers there may seem to be something dishonest in attributing to a historical character a speech which he never did in fact deliver. But that is merely one of the differences between ancient and modern methods of writing history.

[1] 1 Samuel, ch. 12.

The ancient historian allows himself more dramatic licence than his modern successor feels entitled to claim, and puts a speech into the mouth of one of the principal characters where a modern writer would insert a few impersonal paragraphs upon the general situation. Such dramatising of history is not confined to the Bible. It was practised by the Greek historian Thucydides[1] when writing his account of the Peloponnesian war. Though he was describing events which were within his own memory he puts into the mouths of his characters speeches which he admits never were delivered. That seemed to him to be the best method of sketching their policy.

We do not know who wrote the twelfth chapter of the first book of Samuel. But if he could have foreseen that a day would come when the religious leaders of his nation would sink to the avowal *We have no King but Caesar*[2] he would have known that his forebodings were not imaginary.

At first the monarchy was extremely successful. *Saul fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the Kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself he vexed them. And he gathered an host and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them.*[3] Politically his appointment was entirely justified. But at the very outset of his reign he went outside the limits of his authority. He had collected an army at Gilgal for a campaign against the Philistines, and expected Samuel to come to offer the

[1] Bk. I. ch. 22. [2] St. John, ch. 19 v. 15.
[3] 1 Sam. ch. 14. vv. 47–48.

prescribed sacrifices. Seven days passed, and Samuel did not appear. It was impossible to begin the campaign until the sacrifices had been offered, and the people began to desert. Accordingly Saul took the matter into his own hands.[1]

No sooner had he done so than Samuel arrived. Saul was told that his action was presumptious, and in direct disobedience to God's commands. In consequence, his kingdom should not continue. His son would not succeed him; but after his death the crown, to use a convenient anachronism, would pass to another family.

This occurrence illustrates a difference between the Jewish conception of kingship and that common amongst other primitive peoples. The primitive king is usually, like Melchizedek, also priest of his tribe. The most sacred and important religious rites can only be performed by him. But in Jewish eyes the royal and priestly functions are entirely distinct. The King is indeed a sacred personage. He is *the Lord's anointed*, and holds his authority from God. He exists to carry out God's will, but although he is the head of the State he cannot arrogate to himself any priestly function.

The detail may seem to be a small one, but it is worth noting.

Saul's successor was found in the person of David, the son of Jesse. He was anointed by Samuel on the understanding that Saul should retain the kingdom for his lifetime.

Attempts upon his life were unsuccessful, and after the death of Saul and Jonathan at the battle of

[1] 1 Sam. ch. 13.

Mount Gilboa David was proclaimed *King of Judàh* in Hebron.[1]

His accession was not, however, unopposed. The House of Saul found a powerful champion in Abner the son of Ner, and civil war ensued. The supporters of David eventually triumphed, and he was recognized as the only lawful King of Israel.

As soon as his throne was secure, his first act was to complete the conquest of Canaan. Hitherto the ancient citadel of the Jebusites had defied all attacks, and was regarded by its defenders as impregnable. It fell before the bold strategy of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, and (under the name of *Jerusalem*) became the sacred and secular capital of the Hebrew race.

The capture of Jerusalem is one of the great landmarks in Hebrew history. Hitherto the Jews had been no more than a struggling predatory tribe, compelled to fight desperately for a precarious independence.

Now they had become a nation with a monarchy and a capital, whose sovereigns could meet neighbouring princes on terms of equality. And it had become possible to provide a permanent resting-place for the Sacred Ark.

The Ark of the Covenant was the only visible symbol of its faith which the Hebrew nation possessed. It was a perpetual reminder of the wonderful things which God had done for them in the past, and of the great destiny which they had yet to fulfil. Yet during the period of the conquest it had had no settled home. Once it had even passed for a time into the possession of the Philistines.[2] When Jerusalem fell

[1] 2 Sam. ch. 2. [2] 1 Sam. ch. 4.

into David's hands it became possible for the first time to build a permanent Temple for the worship of God, where the Ark might be kept in security. Jerusalem was more than the national capital. It was the place where the heart of every Hebrew was lifted up to heavenly desires and strengthened by the continual assurance of the immediate Presence of God. Perhaps no city has ever meant so much to any people.

David spared no effort to make the House of God outwardly worthy of its purpose. He collected materials upon a very lavish scale, but the actual work of construction was carried out by his son and successor, Solomon, with the help of Hiram, King of Tyre. During the reign of Solomon the Hebrew Monarchy reached its zenith. He became a proverb for wealth and wisdom, and outside the Bible he fills a large place in Jewish legend. Though he could hardly be said to have possessed an empire, and though his power can never have been comparable with that of either Egypt or Assyria, yet no sovereign of his race has ruled over so wide a kingdom since. With the exception of the territory of the Philistines, which apparently kept its independence, his dominions extended from the frontier of Egypt to the Euphrates, and his position was further strengthened by the fact that one of his wives was an Egyptian princess.[1] He had a fleet in the Mediterranean which brought him silver from the mines of Tarshish, and another on the Red Sea which brought him gold from Ophir, and other products of the further East. His court was undoubtedly more magnificent than that of any of his successors, and during the latter part of his life he

[1] 1 Kings, ch. 4.

adopted the usual habits of an Oriental prince. There is no concealment of the fact that he abandoned the lofty ideal with which he had begun his reign.

But Solomon's magnificence strained the resources of his kingdom to the breaking point. As soon as he was dead a deputation came to his son, Rehoboam, to beg for some relief from the ruinous burden of taxation with which they were oppressed.

Rehoboam's reply breathes the worst possible spirit of irresponsible despotism. He does not recognize any limit to his own authority, and dismisses contemptuously the idea that his subjects can possess any rights whatever. *My father*, he replied, *made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.*[1]

The result was an immediate rebellion. Israel (*i.e.* the northern tribes) rebelled against the House of David, and the kingdom was divided into two principalities. The dominions of Rehoboam were reduced to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin only. The author of the first book of The Kings, who wrote at some later period,[2] considers the rebellion to have been justifiable. Rehoboam's conduct was morally indefensible, and therefore he deserved to lose by it. But no contemporary historian of another nation would have shared his view. In Oriental eyes a king has a right to act as he desires. He may be unsuccessful and unfortunate. If so, he will probably lose his kingdom and his life. But he cannot be wrong.

[1] 1 Kings, ch. 12. v. 14.

[2] *Ib.* v. 19. *So Israel rebelled against the house of David until this day.*

The northern tribes found themselves a king in the person of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who established his capital at Samaria. He saw that the Temple at Jerusalem was a standing menace to his power. As long as the eyes of his subjects were turned towards it, and as long as pilgrimages were made to the City of David, the possibility of a collective return of the Israelites to the House of David could not be ignored.

Accordingly, he provided a rival worship with its own priesthood. He set up two golden calves, one in Bethel and one in Dan, and *made priests of all the lowest of the people which were not of the sons of Levi.*[1] He declared that journeys to Jerusalem were an unnecessary and intolerable burden, and that the Calves were the gods which had brought Israel out of Egypt.

(His choice of Calves may have been due to the fact that he himself had lived in Egypt for a time. Apis, the sacred bull, was one of the principal Egyptian divinities.)

The expedient was successful. The northern kingdom took whole-heartedly to idolatry, a fact which suggests that the Hebrew conquest of that part of Canaan had never been very thorough. The *Revolt of the Ten Tribes* may have been a rebellion of the original owners of the soil more than of men of genuine Hebrew stock. In any case, the Old Testament never pretends that the religion of Moses was, during this period, more than the religion of a minority. The very pure and virile monotheism which he inculcated was only kept alive by the outstanding figures of the prophets. It had little

[1] 1 Kings, ch. 12. v. 31.

hold upon the majority of the people. Whether openly or in secret various forms of idolatry were freely practised, and, for the time being, resisted all attempts to extirpate them.[1]

From the accession of Rehoboam the Hebrews were divided into two independent kingdoms. *Judah* (the southern one) had the prestige attaching to the Temple and to the House of David, but *Israel* was the larger and the more powerful. Sometimes these kingdoms were allied, sometimes they were at war. Neither were more than petty principalities, and politically their position was entirely insecure. To the north lay the great and rising power of Assyria: to the south lay the more ancient but now declining power of Egypt. Rivalry between the two was inevitable, and Canaan was the highway from one to the other.

Moreover (a fact which recent events have forced upon our attention), Canaan is the real frontier of Egypt. If it must be so regarded now it was even more important to Egypt then, when an invading army from the north would not be met by the formidable obstacle of the Suez Canal. It was inevitable that both powers should wish to dominate the country. Assyria desired it as a means of striking at Egypt as soon as a convenient opportunity should arise. Egypt knew that it was her first line of defence.

A strong Hebrew State would have had little prospect of maintaining its independence. Probably the most for which it could have hoped would have been to be courted as an ally by both powers. But two separate and hostile principalities could not

[1] Cf. Isaiah, ch. 2. vv. 6-9.

be of sufficient political importance to be worth courting. They were merely a trivial obstacle which either Egypt or Assyria could sweep aside whenever it pleased.

The arbitrary caprice of Rehoboam made the ultimate political ruin of his country inevitable. We need not spend time in tracing the gradual decline of both kingdoms.

The first irreparable blow fell in the year 721 B.C. *In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor, by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. . . . And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.*[1]

The northern kingdom was not only conquered. It was annihilated. The Kingdom of Judah lingered for nearly a century and a half. The final disaster came in the year 586, when the troops of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, destroyed Jerusalem and deported the majority of the inhabitants.[2] The Hebrew State had now ceased to exist, and there seemed to be little likelihood of its reappearance. No more complete political disaster has ever overtaken any people.

Such in outline is the history of the Hebrews from their entry into Canaan down to what is known as *The Exile*. Except for a short period during the reigns of David and Solomon it is little but a record

[1] 2 Kings, ch. 17. vv. 6 and 24. [2] 2 Kings, ch. 24-25.

of ever-deepening failure ending in catastrophe. The Bible does not try to disguise either the failure or the fact that it was deserved. The ideals which had inspired Joshua had been abandoned, and in spite of heroic efforts upon the part of individuals had never been the real foundation of the national life.

We must now consider the question—What has all this to do with us to-day? What concern have we with the history of what was admittedly an insignificant Semitic tribe? Like other Oriental histories, it contains stories of ferocity and treachery which any decent person nowadays must regard with disgust.

These stories might be useful for inculcating patriotism of a somewhat militant and fanatical type, but even if that can be considered a desirable object it is certainly not a religious one. And there is some danger lest their effect upon the young should be positively bad. Was the world really any poorer when the Hebrews were incorporated into the more civilized Assyrian and Babylonian Empires? Would it not be better to ignore the whole blood-stained story of failure in the hope that it will soon be forgotten?

I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that that is how many people feel to-day towards the historical books of the Old Testament. There is an apparent justice in their contentions, and religious teachers must be prepared to meet their questions.

With those of them who are not Christians we are not now concerned. We are considering the Bible from the Christian standpoint, which is always beyond the comprehension of a heathen, whatever his race,

colour, or the degree of civilization to which he has attained.

But there are many Christians who do not understand why these histories should be read in Church. They know that the characters are not models for us to copy; but they are not clear what attitude we are supposed to adopt towards them, or what we are intended to learn from the recital of their doings.

Many of them are more than half afraid that the Church is unduly conservative in keeping these stories in its public worship. They are injurious to religion, and the Church's retention of them makes it increasingly difficult for any thoughtful person to be a Christian.

The answer to the question—*Why should these stories be read in Church?* falls into two parts. The first part (which is the more important) turns upon the nature of the Christian religion. The second turns upon certain characteristics of the stories themselves.

1. A peculiar feature of the Christian religion is that it has never professed to be anything but a growth. Unlike many other faiths (notably Buddhism and Islam) it did not base its original appeal to mankind upon the fact that it was an entirely new departure.

In some respects our Lord broke with the customs and traditions of His day. In others He made a particular point of conforming to them. He declared that He had not come to destroy the Old Testament but to fulfil it,[1] and paid an extraordinarily high tribute to those who *sat in Moses' seat.*[2]

[1] St. Matt. ch. 5. v. 17. [2] *Ib.* ch. 23. v. 2.

Even St. Paul, whom critics such as Mr. G. B. Shaw,[1] regard as the real founder of the Church of history, did not try to disguise the connection between the Gospel which he preached and what had gone before it. If he had, Christianity might have spread more rapidly.

The writer *To the Hebrews*, though his point is that the final choice between Law and Gospel can be delayed no longer, takes the same line. He bases his whole appeal to his countrymen on the contention that the Christian Church is the natural and legitimate outcome of the Jewish.

Nowhere does the Christian religion present itself as involving a breach of continuity with the past. It transcends the past as manhood transcends childhood. But it has a past which it cannot disavow. Nor has it any need to wish to do so.

In other words, it is inextricably bound up with history, and chiefly with the history of one particular people. We may wish that that history had been different; we may think that if it had been different the advantage to the whole world would have been very great. But we cannot change it. It is good for us to *look unto the rock whence we are hewn and the hole of the pit whence we are digged*, even if our origins do not now commend themselves to our fastidious taste. It ought not to make us disparage what we have now, to realize that our spiritual origin was a humble one. We do not think the worse of other things because they have sprung from small beginnings.

Christianity is inextricably bound up with history. In some ultra-philosophic eyes this is a weakness

[1] *Androcles and the Lion* (Introduction). The idea is not his own.

which must in some way be overcome if Christianity is to endure. In reality, however, it is a source of strength. A theory of any kind is always liable to become outworn if it has never professed to be more than a theory. It is impossible not to anticipate a day when it will be obsolete. There have been systems of philosophy which were hailed as the last word when they made their appearance, but are now of no interest save to antiquarians. And there will doubtless be many more.

And it is noteworthy that cultivated critics who wish to disparage Christianity always do treat it as being from first to last nothing but a theoretical philosophical system. By handling it in that way they are able to pick many holes in it and to prove conclusively that its day is done. To those who understand it better this method of attack recalls Don Quixote's assault upon the windmill.[1]

A religion which owes its origin to an individual thinker always rests upon a precarious foundation. It may achieve rapid and brilliant successes, as the religion of Mahomet did. But there is always at least a possibility that it may be entirely discredited and disappear.

But a religion which has grown gradually with the life of a nation is on very different ground. It will

[1] For some time past a school of German thinkers, of whom Professor Eucken is the best known, have taken the line that Christianity can only hope to survive by divesting itself of its historical associations. Recent events have helped to explain why the German mind resents any attempt to link religion with real life. Professor Eucken appears to have a very real religion of his own which is not without interest. But few people outside Germany or Holland are likely to confuse it with Christianity.

stand—until it becomes possible to undo the past. If it contain harsh and deplorable passages in its earlier stages, that is because it is in intimate contact with real life. We may affirm confidently that a religion which does not involve any abrupt break with the past will continue as long as human life continues on this planet. It was a true instinct which led the Hebrew writer to represent the first promise of Redemption as made to Adam and Eve at the gate of Eden. Perhaps he did not fully realize the strength of his own foundation. Our religion is in one sense as old as the world. It is linked so indissolubly with life that it will persist as long as life endures.

The historical part of the Old Testament shews us how deep and strong are the roots of our faith. It also reminds us that God's ways of bringing to fruition what He has planted are not always those which we should have expected. That is very largely why many philosophers find the Bible so preposterous and irritating. It does not conform to their ideas of what God ought to do. His actions do not harmonize with their system. For that very reason the Bible is full of encouragement for everybody else, and will retain its power long after other illuminants have been extinguished.

2. No one can read the history of the Hebrew State carefully without perceiving that he is reading a story told in a peculiar way. On the surface it may differ little from the history of any other primitive Oriental people. But as soon as we look into it closely we cannot help being struck by a note of distinction. For it is a story in which considerations of expediency are avowedly given the second place. Naturally they

enter in at times, as do personal ambition, desire for revenge, and other base motives. But throughout it is expressly recognized that considerations of this class are not, and never can be, the deciding factor. There is another in the background, and that is the Righteousness of God. The final test of all actions is whether they are in harmony with that or no, and there is no other test which really matters.

It is not wonderful to find David acting as he did in the case of Bathsheba. His conduct was hardly even a straining of the Royal prerogative as it is, and always has been, understood in the East. But what does give us pause is that a prophet was found to rebuke him.[1]

It is not remarkable that the Brazen Serpent which Moses had made in the wilderness should have become an object of worship. Many tribes have possessed idols upon whose peculiar potency they relied. The astonishing thing is that King Hezekiah broke it to pieces,[2] and did not substitute another.

Naturally the Righteousness of God is often crudely conceived. But there is always the sense that it is the only final test of all actions. There is always a definite effort, despite many lapses, to bring all conduct into harmony with it. In other words, there is an overwhelming sense of a Divine Purpose in history.

The sequence of events is not treated as if it were a kaleidoscope in the hands of blind chance, or of some arbitrary inscrutable Power which, as soon as it has formed one pattern, replaces it by another of neither more nor less value.

[1] 2 Sam. ch. 11-12. [2] 2 Kings, ch. 18. v. 4.

Behind all that goes on there is an Intelligible Power at work, and that Power is Moral. Some of its actions may be momentarily inexplicable, but eventually the meaning of them will become plain. The key to them all is to be found in the perception of the fact that Moral Values alone are permanent. The centre and foundation of the universe is Moral. Viewed in this light and no other, do the changes and chances of this mortal life become intelligible.

It is quite possible that this was not as clear to the original actors as to the historians who subsequently recorded their deeds. That is natural. It is notoriously difficult to judge the true significance of events in which you yourself take part. But it was clear to the authors to whom we owe the books of Joshua and Judges, Samuel and Kings.

They considered that their national history was an unfolding of a Divine Purpose, and told it with the intention of making this plain to their readers.

That shews us why, when the Old Testament was put into its final shape, these books were labelled by the Jews *The Earlier Prophets*. They are *Prophetic* in the true sense of the word. Not that they attempt to foretell the future, but because they shew how the Will of God works itself out in human affairs. That is what lends to human affairs their real dignity and importance.

Most striking of all is the readiness to recognize the hand of God in disaster as well as in success. If that does not make these books absolutely unique among all histories which have ever been written (with the exception of those whose authors were familiar with the Old Testament and had derived their

view of history from it) it is at least a very rare quality.

It is not difficult to believe that God is on your side and has a claim upon your worship if you achieve success. In fact, the test of God has very often been considered to be His power of giving His followers victory over their enemies. When Rabshakeh asked—*Hath any one of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the King of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?* [1] he was adopting a line of argument which was generally regarded as extremely sound. It would appeal strongly to many people to-day. In the ancient world it would probably have been regarded as absolutely unanswerable by everybody, except by the particular people to whom it was addressed.

It is natural for people to look to their God to give them whatever success they may desire, and to regulate their belief in Him accordingly. It amounts to striking a common-sense bargain which may be summed up in the colloquial saying—"*If you'll scratch my back I'll scratch yours.*" Common-sense bargaining with God seems to be the most of which paganism is capable.

On this theory disaster destroys faith. For it means that God has been proved wanting. He is either indifferent, or else He has been overborne by stronger forces. In either case His claim upon our time and energy has been diminished, if not destroyed outright.

[1] Isaiah, ch. 36, vv. 18-19.

Under such circumstances men will either come to ignore their god or else to find fault with him. They may even try to coerce him to a better mind. Savages have been known to flog a sacred image because the god whom it represented had failed to come up to their expectations.[1]

But the Old Testament knows nothing of this temper. Disaster is of God no less than success. And when disaster comes it is never treated as being in any sense due to any failure upon the part of God. The failure has been entirely upon the other side. God has not been unable to help His people, nor has He neglected them in any spirit of careless indifference. He has deliberately allowed them to be defeated for a moral purpose, because they have deserved it. The remedy is not to be found in neglect or abuse of Him, but in renewed effort to walk more perfectly in His ways.

In the eyes of the authors of the Old Testament disaster is the call to a religious revival.

This indicates a quality of belief in God very far removed from anything to be found elsewhere at the time. For it leaves no lurking doubt whatever as to His Power or as to His Goodness. The attitude adopted may be summed up as follows:

1. God could have given us success had He chosen. There can be no question as to His ability to do so.

2. As we have been defeated, it is plain that He did not choose.

[1] Cf. Father Dan's attitude towards the Virgin Mary in *My New Curate*. The author of the book was a Roman Catholic priest.

3. As He is perfectly and unalterably just, He had some sufficient and intelligible reason for withholding His support.

4. Therefore the fault has been ours. What is needed is more change in us.

This attitude persists throughout. It is not destroyed, if anything it is strengthened, by what seems to be the absolutely final disaster of the Exile. It is not necessarily adopted by all the characters concerned, but it is the attitude of the writers to whom we owe the story. It is certainly—to say no more—the way in which the Jews came to think that their history ought to be read.

As we have been put into possession of a conception of the Goodness of God higher than any which ever came within their reach, we are in a position to give very emphatic endorsement to their view. We can affirm positively that all history is an unfolding of some stage in the Divine Purpose, and that God has given us an absolute standard to which it is our duty to make our lives conform. We know that there can be no question of winning Him to our side. That is mere paganism, though it is a view that still exists within the Church.[1] What we have to see to is that we are ranged on the side which He has shewn us to be His. When we have accomplished that nothing else matters.

I do not think that the time will ever come when we can afford to neglect a history which brings out these truths with such vivid and dramatic force. Certainly it has not come yet. We cannot pretend

[1] Calvin's system was a protest against it in the sixteenth century.

that its general standpoint has been assimilated yet by the mass of people in Europe. If it had been, we should have heard less about the religious difficulties produced by the war.

There are still people who think that the war has somehow disparaged the character of God. They have not reached the point from which they would be able to see that the only thing it has discredited is our own characters and the civilization which rests upon them. No one who does not know his Bible is ever likely to reach it.

Many difficulties which are widely felt now arise from the fact that we have not yet learned to make our own—*Who gave Jacob for a spoil and Israel to the robbers?* [1] *Did not the Lord, He against whom we have sinned?* A deeper sense of our own sinfulness would make clear much which is at present obscure to many.

The objections brought against the historical books of the Old Testament by modern critics are for the most part captious. They are prompted by sentiment, and touch nothing save points of detail. They shew that the general standpoint of the books has never been grasped, and that the lessons which are meant to be drawn from them have not been assimilated.

Is the world really too wise and too virtuous to stand in any need of a history told to illustrate the supremacy and unalterable nature of the Divine Righteousness?

If the Hebrew State had been more successful politically its history would perhaps be of less importance now. We are all aware that nothing

[1] Isaiah, ch. 42. v. 24.

succeeds like success, and should all be ready to admire a religious faith which had swept its votaries in a triumphant procession from victory to victory without check or disappointment.

But could anyone save inspired historians have seen the triumph of their God and of His righteousness in the decline and fall of His Chosen People to whom they themselves belonged? Have we nothing to learn from them as to what the words *success* and *failure* really mean?

## CHAPTER V

### THE LATER PROPHETS

It would probably be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the part which the Prophets played in the religious life of Israel. They were the only religious teachers which the nation possessed, because the Temple priesthood did not profess to be a teaching body. Its duty was to safeguard the Ark, and to maintain the sacrifices. It was not expected to teach religion by word of mouth.

In the case of the great majority of the Prophets no record of their teaching has been preserved. We have some utterances of Elijah and Elisha incorporated in the history of their time. We have the rebuke which Nathan addressed to David, and Micaiah's prediction to Jehoshaphat. But apart from these, and from one or two more incidental passages, we are dependent for our knowledge of the contents of the Prophets' teaching upon fifteen books which have come down to us.

These are Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (generally known to English readers as The Major Prophets), and Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (known as The Minor Prophets).

We are accustomed to make four *Major Prophets* by the inclusion of *Daniel*. But he was not counted as a Prophet by the Jews. His book was placed by them in a different division of the Bible, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

By the Jews the twelve *Minor Prophets* were arbitrarily grouped together as one single book, despite the fact that several centuries separate the earliest from the latest.

Thus the books which we count as fifteen the Jews counted as four, and called collectively *The Later Prophets*.

It is not easy to find any standpoint from which to treat the Prophets as a whole. The circumstances and outlook of the individual writers vary considerably, and their writings cover a period of little less than five hundred years. Moreover, some of the books which have come down to us are by more than one hand.

The first thirty-nine chapters of the book of Isaiah are by the Prophet of that name, who tells us that he lived in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah.[1] The rest is by an unknown author[2] who lived some two centuries later during (or after) the reign of Cyrus, King of Persia.

It has become customary to refer to him as *The Evangelical Prophet*, a title derived from the well-known saying of St. Jerome that in his opinion Isaiah wrote a *Gospel rather than a Prophecy*.[3]

[1] Isaiah, I. v. I. [2] Or authors.

[3] *Isaiam, Ezechielem, Danielem quis intelligere aut exponere potest? Quorum primus mihi evangelium potius quam prophetiam scripsisse videtur.*

The book of Zechariah is the work of at least two hands.

The books of Nahum and Joel are perhaps composite also.

The book of Jonah is anonymous. It does not profess to be by Jonah, but only to be about him.

Jonah, the son of Amittai, was a Prophet who lived in the reign of Jeroboam II., King of Israel.[1] But the style and matter of this book shew that it is one of the very latest in the Old Testament. It could not have been produced until long after Jonah's own time.

Malachi should perhaps not be understood as a proper name, but should be translated "*My Messenger.*" If so, the authorship of this book is also unknown.

The first step towards any classification of the prophetic writings is to divide them into two sections according to whether they belong to the period before or after *The Exile.*

The Exile—namely, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans and the removal of the surviving remnant of the inhabitants to Babylonia—is a landmark in the history of the Hebrews comparable only with the Exodus. It was the final destruction of the Hebrew State. The nation was not, indeed, exterminated. Subsequently a small number of them returned, rebuilt the Temple, and lived in and near Jerusalem for another six hundred years. But they were never independent again. They were always a province of some larger empire, although they were sometimes allowed to have princes of their own blood to govern them.

[1] 2 Kings, ch. 14. v. 25.

Since the Exile the Hebrews, despite several furious attempts to regain their independence, have never been a Sovereign State.

(It is after the Exile that the name *Jew* begins to take the place of the older title *Hebrew*, and from that point onwards it will be convenient to speak of them as Jews.)

The Exile modified the religious outlook of the nation profoundly in a variety of ways. It has been said that Israel went into captivity a Nation and returned a Church, and the phrase sums up the change as well as a single sentence can.

1. *It gave the final deathblow to any form of idolatry.*

The Exile was regarded as God's awful judgment upon an idolatrous nation, and the lesson was never forgotten. The Jews were transformed by the captivity into the absolute monotheists which they have been ever since. Before, they had not gone beyond a recognition of Jehovah's supremacy in the Land of Israel. Even Elijah might have been quite prepared to recognize that Baal had his rights at Tyre. Jehovah was not regarded as the only Lord of the whole earth until after the Exile. Since then nothing has been able to shake the conviction.

The importance of this wider conception of the sovereignty of God as part of the preparation of the world for Christ is obvious.

2. *Their religious outlook became more spiritual.*

The second Temple was less splendid than Solomon's, but it represented a loftier faith.

The Hebrew State had never been very successful. It had enjoyed one brief period of glory for which it had paid heavily. And though the hope

of earthly dominion did not die away completely (possibly it is not dead yet), it did become less prominent. The *Kingdom of God* was conceived in a more spiritual fashion, and the idea began to dawn that Righteousness might be able to establish its own supremacy without the support of material power. It would be too much to say that this idea was dominant, but it does begin to appear.

*Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts*[1] was not written until after the catastrophe. Before, the distinction could not have been drawn.

3. *There arose a much more definite anticipation of a life of the world to come.*

In their earlier days the Hebrews seem hardly to have cared to look beyond the grave at all. God was to be served in this life, and the Holy Nation must be continued that a supply of servants may be assured to Him. But of the destiny of the individual soul they seem to have thought but little. Hezekiah could even speak of death as ending his opportunities of serving God.[2] The belief in a life beyond the grave was never as vivid amongst the Jews as it was amongst many other ancient peoples. But it is hardly an appreciable factor in their religion until after the Exile.

This fact must be borne in mind when we read the fierce prayers for vengeance upon their enemies which the Hebrews sometimes breathed.[3] Whether rightly or wrongly these passages now give offence

[1] Zechariah, ch. 4. v. 6.

[2] Isaiah, ch. 38. vv. 18-19.

[3] *E.g.* Obadiah ; Ps. 69, 83, etc.

to many Christians, and are sometimes attacked by outsiders who wish to discredit the Bible generally.

Without attempting to discuss what attitude the Church should adopt towards them now, this much is to be remembered.

The authors were passionately convinced that God is Just, that He loves and rewards Righteousness, and hates and punishes Iniquity. Many people find it impossible to retain this belief now, though we have surer ground for it than the men of the Old Testament possessed. There is probably no one who has not sometimes found it hard.

But the Hebrews who were endeavouring to hold it were met by a difficulty which we escape. In their eyes, if death did not mean absolute extinction, it placed the righteous beyond hope of reward and the evildoer beyond fear of punishment. If there were any life of the world to come it was only a half-life. It was too shadowy to admit of any adequate recompense for the injustices of this world.

Accordingly, if the righteousness of God were to be manifested at all it must be manifested here and now. There was no other possible sphere. And how could it be manifested except by the visible overthrow of those who sinned against Him? If a righteous man died in affliction and a wicked one in prosperity, could any belief in the Sovereignty and Justice of God be maintained?

Behind the prayers for vengeance which grate upon some modern ears, we must hear the appeal—*O God we have trusted in thee: Vindicate Thy Character while there is yet time—and the time is short.*

4. *It led to the development of an elaborate doctrine of angels.*

We can trace the beginning of this in the books of Zechariah and of Daniel. In the later Jewish writings, which were never included in the Old Testament, it is sometimes pushed to fantastic lengths. It seems to have become a prominent feature of popular Jewish religion, and is undoubtedly an element in the atmosphere in which the Christian Church began.

Before any of the exiled Jews had returned to Jerusalem Babylonia had become part of the Persian Empire. It is possible that both these beliefs—in personal immortality after death and in a vast hierarchy of angels—owe much to Persian influence.

Some English readers of the Bible may resent the suggestion that the Jewish religion owes anything to an outside source.

Granted that the Bible does use Babylonian myths and legends common to all the Semitic peoples as vehicles of religious teaching,[1] can we maintain that, at a comparatively late period in their history, the Jews borrowed any heathen beliefs?

If we do, must we not dethrone the Bible from the pre-eminent position which the Church has always accorded to it, and count it as merely one among the Sacred Literatures of the world?

The difficulty can only be acute if we have made up our minds beforehand as to the exact nature of Divine Inspiration and the method of its working. We might not have expected the Jews to have borrowed anything from the Persians. But if it

[1] See Chap. I.

appears to be the case that they did, our theory of *Inspiration* must be enlarged to take account of the fact. It is possible that the title of a religion to be called *Inspired* may rest upon its inclusive as much as upon its exclusive character. Some beliefs and practices it must definitely exclude, otherwise it could possess no positive character and would be unable to offer its disciples any sort of guidance. It might afford abundant material for the discussions of a debating society, but that would be the limit of its usefulness.

But this is no reason why it should not come to include some things which have had their source elsewhere, unless we assume that the belief that God revealed Himself in a unique manner to one particular people carries with it the belief that He never revealed Himself at all to anybody else.

If *Inspiration* means anything at all it must confer peculiar powers of spiritual discernment. If so, we must defer to the judgment of the Jews as to what they were right to borrow from the religious beliefs of other people. At any rate, we must be disposed to defer to it, unless something in the fuller revelation which we enjoy proves it to have been mistaken.

The following is a chronological table of the Prophets. The dates given are in some cases more or less conjectural, because the books contain no positive indication. We can only guess their date, partly by our general knowledge of history which may enable us to identify the circumstances to which the prophet refers, and partly by the style and language. In some cases the margin of uncertainty is considerable.

The question is one for expert Hebrew scholars, so I cannot presume to offer any independent opinion. But the following table represents the views of those who seem to be best qualified to judge.

*a. Before the Exile.*

Amos, Hosea } about 780 B.C.
I. Isaiah (Chapters 1-39) from 740 onwards.
Micah from 730 onwards.
Zephaniah about 625.
Nahum about 605.
Habakkuk about 600.
Jeremiah from 626-586.

*b. During the Exile.*

Ezekiel from 592 onwards.
Obadiah about 585.

*c. The Return and After.*

I. Zechariah (Chapters 1-8), Haggai } about 520.
*The Evangelical Prophet* (Isaiah, Chapter 40-end) about 500.
Joel about 500 or later.
Malachi about 450.
II. Zechariah (Chapters 9-end) about 320, or from 320 onwards.
Jonah, about 300.

(The most doubtful dates are those of Habakkuk and Joel. Their books are short, and contain nothing which enables us to fix positively the circumstances under which they were written.)

It has been said above that the meaning which we generally attach now to the word *Prophetic* is rather

misleading as a description of the contents of these books. The writers are not so much Prophets in our sense of the word as Preachers of Righteousness—Political, Social, and Individual. This (to which must be added their highly imaginative and poetical style) makes them difficult for modern English readers to understand. Much of what the Prophets have to say relates to the history of their own time, and without some knowledge of that history is unintelligible.

Such questions as—What is the value of a political alliance with Egypt? How far is invasion from the north an imminent danger?—are continually reflected in their pages. The background of the Prophets is not only the religious and social condition of Israel itself, but the general history of Western Asia for nearly five hundred years.

There are now plenty of commentaries to be had which fill in this background for us. But they demand more time than many people can be expected to give to them. Without such study the Prophets are not valueless, but it is impossible to do them full justice.

I propose to take each book separately and to say something about the general nature of its contents and the circumstances under which it was written. Then to try to sum up what all the Prophets have in common, and to estimate their value to us to-day.

1. *Amos.*

He tells us that he was a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit at Tekoa, a hilly region lying a few miles to the south-west of Bethlehem. He was not

a person of any standing, but delivers his message in obedience to an overwhelming sense of a Divine Call. When Amaziah the priest of Bethel complained of him to Jeroboam II., King of Israel, and requested that he might be banished to his native Judah, Amos' defence was—*I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son. . . . And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.*[1]

He begins by denouncing the cruel and aggressive wars waged by the surrounding nations—Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. Their conduct is an offence in the sight of God, and will assuredly bring its own punishment. But the kingdoms of Judah and Israel are no better. Their offence is different, consisting of oppression of the poor, drunkenness, and the degradation of religion. But their guilt is greater, because more was to be expected of them. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities.*[2]

The security which they believe themselves to enjoy as being especially favoured by God will prove to be imaginary. When *the day of the Lord* comes it will be a day of judgment and catastrophe. Israel (the northern kingdom) is the worst offender, and will be carried into captivity *beyond Damascus*. Punishment will fall upon Judah as well. But there is hope that here it will lead to amendment, so that *the tabernacle of David* may be raised up again, and a new era of prosperity may begin.

[1] Ch. 7. vv. 14 and 15.
[2] Ch. 3. v. 2.

2. *Hosea.*

Like Amos, his contemporary, Hosea's message is primarily for the northern kingdom.[1] Unlike Amos, however, Hosea himself belonged to it, and therefore naturally took more interest in its fortunes than in those of Judah. Politically they were declining fast, and it was clear that the dreaded Assyrian invasion was imminent.

There was a party which favoured alliance with Egypt as the only hope against Assyria. But in Hosea's eyes any alliance with a foreign power is sin and will lead to disaster.

His own married life seems to have been unhappy, and the unfaithfulness of his wife to him is treated as a picture of the relations between the nation and God. The whole nation has committed whoredom by turning away from God to the practice of various forms of idolatry. His indictment of Israel is summed up in the words—*There is no truth nor mercy nor knowledge of God in the land.*[2]

Punishment in the form of invasion and conquest will come upon the people for their sin. But if they repent, they will find that God's mercy has not been exhausted.

As Amos and Hosea were approximately contemporary, their writings have much in common. The sins which they denounce are much the same, and the same punishment (namely, an Assyrian invasion) is predicted.

These two books are as they stand now probably

[1] Which he usually calls *Ephraim*. Ephraim was the most important of the Ten Tribes of which it consisted.

[2] Ch. 4. v. 1.

the oldest in the Old Testament. We have them as they left their authors' hands. Other books may contain older material, but they have been edited at a later period.

Our earliest picture of Hebrew religious ideals, and of the extent to which they were ignored in current practice, is supplied by Amos and Hosea.

3. *Isaiah.*

Of Isaiah himself we know nothing for certain, except that he was the son of Amoz and belonged to the kingdom of Judah. There is a tradition that he was of royal blood, and that he was put to death by being sawn asunder during the reign of Manasseh.

His prophetic activity begins about the year 740, and covers some forty years.

During this period the political outlook of the kingdom of Judah was peculiarly stormy. Tiglath-Pileser, who had become King of Assyria in 745, was bent on schemes of conquest, and Rezin, King of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel, formed a defensive alliance against him. When Judah refused to join them they invaded it twice—first at the end of Jotham's reign and subsequently during the reign of Ahaz. In spite of Isaiah's assurance that the invasion was not really formidable, Ahaz in panic sought alliance with Tiglath-Pileser, and voluntarily made his kingdom a dependency of the Assyrian Empire.

The immediate danger was averted by the Assyrian conquest of Syria and the northern part of Israel in 732.

Ten years later Samaria was taken by Sargon, and the northern kingdom came to an end.

There was now a party at Jerusalem which favoured

alliance with Egypt. But Isaiah maintained that such an alliance would be wrong in principle and useless when the emergency arose. The power of Egypt belonged to the past: a view which was strikingly confirmed by the complete defeat of the Egyptians by Sargon at Raphia in the year 720.

Nine years later the Assyrians were in Palestine again, and took the ancient Philistine city of Ashdod.

In 706 Sennacherib became King of Assyria, and both Egypt and Babylon endeavoured to revolt against him. Against the advice of Isaiah, who saw that Judah's only hope of retaining even a nominal independence lay in accepting the situation and in submitting to Assyria, King Hezekiah joined the rebellion. It was unsuccessful, and he was compelled to pay a heavy fine. A little later Sennacherib actually besieged Jerusalem, but an outbreak of plague in his army compelled him to retire without having taken it. This event, which took place in 701, is the last certain date in Isaiah's life.

From this summary it will be seen that Isaiah was much more of a statesman than either of his predecessors, or than any subsequent prophet with the exception of Jeremiah.

He was called to be the counsellor of kings under very difficult circumstances, and his 'policy' may be roughly summed up as follows. "Politically Assyria is for the moment irresistible. No alliance can be of any value against it. But the King of Assyria is merely an instrument in God's hand for the punishment of sinners. He cannot touch us if we walk in God's ways. And when his work is finished, his arrogance will be punished by his own

overthrow." It was strikingly confirmed by the course of events.

The religious and social background is much the same as in Amos and Hosea. There is the same denunciation of undisguised idolatry, and of nominal worship of God, which was mere formalism without any effect upon life. There is the same protest against luxury, sensuality, and oppression of the poor, in which again the northern kingdom seems to have been the worst offender.

The prediction of a brighter age to come as the outcome of some genuine loyalty to God is somewhat more definite, and is definitely linked with the reign of a Personal Sovereign.[1] It is a reign rather than a period.

Like Amos, Isaiah undertook his prophetic mission in obedience to an overwhelming sense of Divine Vocation.[2]

4. *Micah.*

Micah was a native of Moresheth-gath, a village lying between the hills of Judah and the Philistine plain. He began his work in the reign of Jotham, and may have continued it right through the reign of Hezekiah (726-697). He was thus a younger contemporary of Isaiah, and the works of the two should be read together. But he differs from Isaiah in that he did not belong to the capital and the ruling class, but was a countryman of humble

[1] Ch. 2. vv. 1-5; ch. 4; ch. 9. vv. 6-8; ch. 11. It is to be remembered that Isaiah's prophecies cover some forty years, and that the order in which they now stand may not be the one in which they were originally delivered.

[2] Ch. 6.

origin. His book consists of a number of detached prophecies, uttered apparently at considerable intervals. It therefore presents abrupt transitions which must perplex the reader if he tries to treat it as a single connected composition.

The general background is that the religious reforms carried out by Hezekiah at Jerusalem have proved disappointing. The religion of the capital is still very far from the pure and spiritual faith which it was meant to be. To this must be added the ever-present danger from Assyria, which, now that Samaria has been destroyed, is continually at the very gates of Judah. It was leading many to doubt the power of God, but Micah maintains that even if Jerusalem were to be destroyed for its sins that would not mean that God had failed or forsaken His people. He would restore them from elsewhere. *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel.*[1]

The last two chapters (which may possibly be by a later hand) dwell on the fact that conduct is of more moment in the sight of God than ceremonial sacrifice, and holds out hope of pardon for sinners because God *delighteth in mercy.*

5. *Zephaniah.*

When Zephaniah wrote there had been no prophet for fully half-a-century. To his generation the kingdom of Israel was merely a name and a warning. There was no one left who could remember when it still existed. Between him and his predecessors lay the reign of Manasseh, when every form of idolatry

[1] Ch. 5. v. 2.

had been openly encouraged and practised in Jerusalem. The religious reformations which Josiah carried out in 621 B.C. (to which perhaps we owe the book Deuteronomy) were still in the future. Possibly they were in part due to Zephaniah's influence.

Accordingly the greater part of the book is an uncompromising denunciation of the prevalent idolatry—*I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord.*[1] The day of punishment, which is described as *the great day of the Lord*, is close at hand. The method will be the invasion of a foreign power, which is God's instrument for the execution of judgment.

But it will not be the ancient enemy Assyria. The dreaded invaders are almost certainly the savage Scythians who had appeared from the unknown north,[2] and were already spreading terror and desolation throughout large tracts of Western Asia. In 626 they came down the coast and ravaged the Philistine plain. It does not, however, appear that they attacked Judah.

Zephaniah may have written either just before or just after this event. In any case the danger was one which could not be overlooked. If it had already come and gone, it might recur. Portions of the book, notably the last seven verses of Chapter III., seem to be by a later hand. Their subject-matter, as well as their style and language, go to shew that they belong to the period of the Exile, or possibly to the period after the return from Babylon.

[1] Ch. I. v. 2.

[2] Their original home seems to have been southern Russia or the neighbourhood of the Caspian. The unexpected nature of their appearance made it additionally terrifying.

6. *Nahum.*

Nothing is known about Nahum himself, and the site of his native place, Elkosh, cannot be fixed.

He wrote some time after the fall of No[1] (Thebes) in Egypt before the Assyrians, which took place in 664 B.C. In 606 Nineveh was destroyed by the rising power of Babylon, and his book must be dated shortly before or shortly after that event. Probably Nineveh was already a ruin when he wrote.

Its theme is that the power and justice of God have been (or are about to be) vindicated by the overthrow of the ancient and relentless enemy of Israel. The nightmare of a century and a half was gone, and Nahum did not see that the power which had overthrown Assyria was destined in the next generation to do what Assyria had never done, and to destroy Jerusalem itself.

7. *Habakkuk.*

Of Habakkuk himself nothing is known. His outlook is upon a land filled with injustice (his charge seems to be of social wrong rather than of idolatry) which God will punish by an invasion of the *Chaldeans.* But their pride and rapacity are such that they will be overthrown in their turn. The reference to the *Chaldeans* (*i.e.* the Babylonian Empire) enables us to date the book within narrow limits.

In 606 Nineveh was taken by them, and the Assyrian Empire fell. Shortly before the close of the century the only remaining rival, Egypt, was defeated at the battle of Carchemish. This left the King of Babylon without a rival in Western Asia, and

[1]Ch. 3. vv. 8-10.

Habakkuk's prophecy was in all probability delivered very shortly afterwards.

The last chapter, which is a hymn upon the Power of God, may be by another hand.

Habakkuk figures in later legend as having been miraculously transported to Babylon to feed Daniel when he was in the Lions' Den. The story is told in a Greek addition to the Book of Daniel, which in English Bibles is printed by itself in the Apocrypha under the title of "Bel and the Dragon." It may preserve a recollection of the fact that he lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem and to share the Exile.

8. *Jeremiah.*

Jeremiah came of a priestly family which was settled at Anathoth, a little to the north of Jerusalem. His prophetic activity began in the thirteenth year of Josiah, and lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586. Like Isaiah, he was conscious of an overwhelming Divine Call to his work.[1]

When Jerusalem was taken he was offered an opportunity of settling at Babylon upon very honourable terms.[2] He refused, preferring to stay with the remnant of the people that was left behind. By them he was taken to Egypt[3] against his will, and there he died, according to a Christian tradition, a violent death. A Jewish tradition, which may be true, says that when he saw the destruction of the Temple to be imminent he removed the sacred Ark from the Holy of Holies and buried it in a cave on Horeb.[4] If the story be trustworthy the remains of

[1] Ch. 1. vv. 4-10. [2] Ch. 40. vv. 2-12.
[3] Ch. 43. [4] 2 Maccabees, ch. 2. vv. 1-8.

it are probably there still, and their discovery may reward some future archaeologist.

Jeremiah saw the final destruction of Jerusalem, and had to warn his countrymen that it was coming. He saw that the religious reforms of Josiah had not gone deep enough, and that the complete change of heart, which alone could have saved the city, was not taking place. He could not, like Isaiah, deliver any message of hope. He had to declare that resistance to the Chaldeans was useless, because they were the instruments of God's judgment upon His people.

Naturally there were those who held that come what might God would keep His Sanctuary inviolate, as He had done when the armies of Sennacherib had encamped against it. Jeremiah had to tell them that they were wrong.

Accordingly he underwent bitter persecution. He was regarded as unpatriotic, if not a religious renegade. He was in prison when his prediction that Jerusalem would fall was fulfilled. He may have lived long enough to see the truth of his second great prediction —that Egypt would prove no secure refuge from the Babylonian armies.

Jeremiah is one of the greatest figures in the Old Testament. No prophet has ever needed more courage to deliver his message, because it was unillumined by a single ray of hope. It is wonderful that his own faith in the God of Israel was strong enough to stand the strain. No religion has ever been linked to one particular spot more closely than was the religion of the Hebrews before the Exile. If the Holy City were trodden down and became a ruinous heap,

if the House wherein God was pleased to dwell and its sacred contents were no more, what remained? What could remain?

Jeremiah found an answer to these questions by raising religion to a higher and more spiritual level. He distinguished its accidental from its essential elements as none had done before him and few have done since. Therefore, even when the catastrophe came he could see a possibility that it might not be beyond repair. Probably he was the only man in the world who could do so at the moment. *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . . for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*[1]

Jeremiah never received justice during his lifetime, and perhaps it has never been fully done him since his death. But he may come to his own in England now as he has never done before. There is no book of the Old Testament to which we have more need to turn to learn faith, courage, and spiritual religion in these days of trial and change. For few men have learned better by life-long experience what (to borrow words written more than six hundred years later at a parallel crisis) is meant by *the removing of those things that are shaken. . . . that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.*[2]

[1] Ch. 31. vv. 31-34.

[2] Hebrews, ch. 12. v. 27.

9. *Obadiah.*

The short book of Obadiah is directed against Edom for having openly exulted over the downfall of Jerusalem. This shews that it must have been written shortly after 586.

The Edomites are warned that their own day of reckoning will come, and that the house of Jacob will be restored. The resemblances between the book and parts of the forty-ninth chapter of Jeremiah are close, and suggest that both prophets are quoting from some unknown source.

10. *Ezekiel.*

Ezekiel differs from all the other prophets in that he was a priest. Jeremiah came of a priestly family, but it does not appear that he had ever discharged the priest's office. But Ezekiel had done so. The Temple and its ceremonial had been for years the centre of his life, and this fact is to be borne in mind when we read his book. He dates it very carefully, so that we are able to say that his first vision came to him in the year 592.

He was then in captivity, which shews that he was one of those who were carried off at the first deportation in 597. Jerusalem existed as a shadow of its former self, with Zedekiah as nominal king, for another eleven years, but it was plain that the final destruction could not be very long delayed.

Ezekiel found himself amongst men who had lost everything. Everything in which they had ever believed was gone, nothing remained to make life worth living any longer.

Not unnaturally they were inclined to surrender to a stolid, hopeless fatalism—*The fathers*, they said,

*have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.*[1] Our fathers' sins have brought this punishment upon us—we can do nothing. It was Ezekiel's task to rouse them from their lethargy. He did not try to explain the situation away. He did not disguise the ruin of Jerusalem, and the profanation of the Temple by open idolatry.

But he met it first by declaring the overwhelming Power of God ; secondly, by maintaining the Freedom and Responsibility of the individual soul.

The book opens with visions of the Power of God, the imagery being symbolic, as no pictorial description is possible.[2] This power has been manifested in history in the fall of Tyre[3] and of Egypt.[4] It will suffice to revive the House of Israel from its present seeming death.[5] And the book closes with a vision of the Temple, rebuilt, and an inexhaustible source of new spiritual power.[6]

To shew that it is not futile to hope for such restoration, Ezekiel teaches that we are responsible for our own conduct and not for that of our predecessors. Their sins cannot entirely destroy our future. Everyone will have to answer to God for himself, and for himself alone. *The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son : the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.*[7]

Hitherto Hebrew thought had laid its principal stress upon the idea of a Righteous Nation. Indivi-

[1] Ch. 18. v. 2. [2] See ch. 1. [3] Chs. 26-28.
[4] Chs. 29-32. [5] Ch. 37.
[6] Chs. 40-48. [7] Ch. 18. v. 20.

dual responsibility was hardly considered. An entire family was to be counted guilty of the sin of one of its members.[1] It was reserved for Ezekiel to bring out the importance and worth of the individual soul, which was further emphasized by our Lord.

It is obvious that such teaching makes for a higher standard of personal conduct, and lays a fresh stress upon all moral values. It is possible that it also had a good deal to do with the development of belief in personal immortality after death.

11. *Haggai.*

The book of Haggai presents little difficulty. In 538 Cyrus had given permission to the Jewish exiles to return from Babylonia. Advantage had been taken of the concession, and the work of rebuilding the City and Temple had been begun. But the Jews had been much hindered by their own poverty, bad seasons, the hostility of the Samaritans, and the suspicions of Cyrus' successor. At the end of nineteen years very little had been done.

Haggai appeals for an effort to complete the Temple. A favourable opportunity had arisen from the fact that Darius had just possessed himself of the Persian throne. This had produced a political ferment, of which the final outcome was still in doubt—*Yet once it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations.*[2]

The political crisis gave the Jews an opportunity of pushing on the work of rebuilding unnoticed and therefore unhindered. Haggai urges them to regard it as part of the Divine Plan, and to take advantage of it.

[1] *E.g.* Joshua, ch. 7. vv. 10-26. [2] Ch. 2. vv. 6-7.

12. *Zechariah.*

The author of the first eight chapters of our Book of Zechariah was a member of a priestly family, and a contemporary of Haggai. Like Haggai he wrote to encourage the people to persevere in the task of rebuilding Jerusalem, by assuring them that God's care for them is not exhausted, and that they may therefore count with confidence upon final success. At the same time he is careful to maintain that moral renewal of the people must keep pace with the rebuilding of the material fabric of the Holy City.

But his book is not very easy for English readers to understand. A large part of it consists of symbolic visions. This method of writing, which had been begun by Ezekiel, is generally called *apocalyptic*, from a Greek word *apokaluptein*, meaning *to reveal*. Virtually it is a method of teaching by the eye rather than by the ear. Certain things—Angels, Chariots and Horses, Lamps, or whatever it may be—are shewn to the prophet. He describes them, and sometimes adds an explanation. But as a rule he leaves his readers to gather the meaning for themselves. No doubt such pictures were more easily understood by the people for whom they were intended than they are by us.

We cannot always find the key to them, but can only guess their meaning.

This kind of writing was extensively practised by the Jews between 200 B.C.–100 A.D., though little of it was ever included in either the Old Testament or the New. It certainly coloured the atmosphere in which the Christian Church began. The example best known to most English readers is The Revelation of St. John.

In some cases the obscurity is probably intentional, and is due to the fact that the Jews were no longer free. The possibility of persecution was always hanging over their heads, and it might be prudent not to express their beliefs and hopes too plainly. An *apocalyptic* book was intelligible to all who were meant to understand it. But if a copy should get into wrong hands it would—to borrow a colloquialism—give nothing away, and so no harm would be done.

The gist of Zechariah's appeal—for trust in God and confidence in the two leaders, Joshua the High-Priest and Zerubbabel—for Purity of Life, for Courage, and for Perseverance, is sufficiently clear. But we cannot say exactly what meaning is to be attached to each detail of every vision.

13. *The Evangelical Prophet.*

This is the title which has been adopted to describe the anonymous author of the last twenty-seven chapters of our Book of Isaiah. We can only say of him that he must have lived after the Exile, probably not very long after the Return. If we fix his date at about 500 B.C. we shall not be very far wrong.

His theme is that the destruction of Jerusalem and sufferings of the people have been a righteous judgment of God upon their sins. Now their restoration has been a supreme manifestation of His Power—*Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold He taketh up the isles as a very little thing.*[1]

But the great drama of the destruction and restoration of Israel has not been acted for the benefit of one nation only. *The Servant of God* has suffered, and

[1] Ch. 40. v. 15.

not he only but the whole world is the richer for his sufferings.[1]

The New Jerusalem is to be more than the capital of one small State. It is to be a centre to which the whole world is to look.[2]

We cannot say exactly how the prophet expected his vision to be fulfilled, possibly he could not have said himself. But though there may be some idea of territorial dominion in his mind, there is no question that he looks for something more than the mere establishment of a greater empire than Solomon's.[3]

He had a vision of a purified Israel as the spiritual light of the whole world, and expressed it in language of incomparable power and beauty. No one can read these twenty-seven chapters without feeling the force of St. Jerome's comment.[4]

There is no better way of appreciating the spiritual value of the Exile than to compare the outlook of these chapters with that of the older prophets. If we may borrow a modern phrase and use it in a higher sense, the Evangelical Prophet was the first son of Abraham to *think imperially*.

The prophets before him wrote with a courage and insight which compel our admiration. But theirs was not a world-wide vision. Their God was not the God of the whole earth, and all nations were not equally His children.

14. *Joel.*

Nothing is known about Joel beyond his own statement that he was the son of Pethuel. But the

[1] Ch. 52. v. 13-ch. 53. The *Servant* is the nation regarded as a whole and spoken of as if it were a single individual.

[2] Ch. 49. v. 7. [3] Ch. 55. [4] See above, p. 123.

general style and contents of his book make it probable that it was not written until after the Exile.

The immediate occasion was a devastating plague of locusts which is very vividly described, as if it were an invading army. The scourge is regarded as a Divine Judgment, and as an earnest of the *day of the Lord*,[1] which is close at hand. The need of national repentance and amendment is great, but God will never utterly forsake His people—*The Lord will be the hope of His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more.*[2]

15. *Malachi.*

This book is in all probability anonymous. *Malachi* means *My Messenger*, and is probably a title rather than a proper name. A Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Ezra.

It is addressed primarily to a Priesthood who had become scandalous in the performance of their official duties. Their conduct was bringing religion into contempt. The need of the time was a revival of personal religion and more strict observance of the law of Moses.

This enables us to date it with some confidence shortly before 433 B.C., when Nehemiah paid his second visit to Jerusalem. The reforms which he and Ezra had carried out had failed to produce all that had been expected of them.

The external fabric of worship was there, but there was need of revival from within if it were to be in any

[1] Ch. 2. v. 2. [2] Ch. 3. vv. 16 and 17.

way worthy of the God in Whose Name it was offered. The book is unique inasmuch as it is an appeal to a class rather than to the whole nation.

16. *II. Zechariah.*

The last five chapters of our Book of Zechariah are admittedly obscure, and may well be by more than one hand.

The beginning of Chapter 9 plainly refers to the campaign of Alexander the Great against Syria, Phoenicia and the country of the Philistines in 332 B.C.

The general gist is that Jerusalem has suffered much and has more to suffer yet. Her sons are scattered up and down the world, but *they shall increase as they have increased. And I will sow them among the people: and they shall remember Me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again.*[1]

Jerusalem shall eventually be restored, *and the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and His Name one.*[2]

Whatever may be the date and source of these chapters they contain a stirring message of hope and courage for times of trouble. They are also marked by something of the width of outlook which *The Evangelical Prophet* had introduced into the religion of Israel.

17. *Jonah.*

With the exception of the early chapters of Genesis, there is no book of the Old Testament which has been

[1] Ch. 10. vv. 8 and 9. This passage is a mark of late date because it shews that the *Dispersion* (the settlement of Jewish colonies in the principal centres of the civilized world, cf. St. James, ch. 1. v. 1) had at least begun.

[2] Ch. 14. v. 9.

more discussed (and more misunderstood) than the Book of Jonah.

It is often selected by street-corner atheists as an object of attack, and is undoubtedly a source of perplexity to many Christians. Are we expected to believe that a human being was ever swallowed by a fish, remained alive in the fish's belly for three days, and was then cast upon the land unharmed?

There are no doubt some people who hold that the point has been settled for all Christians by the direct authority of our Lord Himself. *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*[1]

But to make our Lord's words in this connection an authoritative confirmation of a fact is to put upon them an interpretation which they were not intended to bear. The question of the historical accuracy of the story was not under discussion. His point was that the Son of Man should be *three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* After the manner of an Oriental teacher He enforced it by an illustration taken from a well-known story. It made no difference to any of His hearers, as it would make none anywhere in the East to-day, whether the story was true to fact or not.

The difficulty of regarding it as a fact is not met by saying—It was a miracle, and God can do anything! No Christian would wish to deny that God can do what He pleases. But we believe that He has gradually revealed Himself to men, more and more fully as the ages go on, and that He has shewn His Character

[1] St. Matt. ch. 12. v. 40.

to be always consistent with Itself. We believe that He has given us ground for holding that He does not work miracles of this kind. At least, the presumption that He does not do so is a very strong one.

Let me say as plainly as I can that I have no prejudice whatever against miracles, nor any desire to explain them away. I am not trying to water down the Bible story because I am under the influence of any such consideration as—*How much will Jones believe?* [1]

I am not immediately concerned with *Jones'* opinions upon any point. I am concerned only with trying to find out what the author of the story really meant when he wrote it. That is of more importance than what some of his readers may have thought he meant.

The book is unquestionably one of the very latest in the Old Testament, and therefore cannot have been written by Jonah, the son of Amittai. Nor does it profess to be. It is a book about Jonah, and bears the same relation to him as the plays of *Macbeth* or *King Lear* do to the persons from whom they derive their title.

The prayer of Jonah [2] is not the supplication of a man whose life is in abnormal peril, but the thanksgiving of one who has escaped from drowning.

Briefly, the story is as follows. Jonah, a Hebrew prophet, is commanded by God to go to Nineveh and warn the inhabitants that their destruction is at hand. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire,

[1] Cf. *Some Loose Stones* (a criticism of the book of essays called *Foundations*), by R. A. Knox.

[2] Ch. 2. vv. 2-9.

which had been for a century and a half the arch enemy of Israel. It was the type of heathen pride, aggressiveness, and cruelty. Instead of obeying the command, he endeavours to flee to Tarshish,[1] that is, to go as far as possible in the opposite direction. On the way a storm arose, and he was thrown overboard to save the ship. He was swallowed by a fish, and three days afterwards thrown up upon dry land. Realizing the futility of attempting to disobey God, he went to Nineveh and delivered his message—*Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*

Whereupon the unexpected happened. The people of Nineveh repented of their sins from the King downwards, and the blow did not fall. Jonah was bitterly angry at the non-fulfilment of his prediction. He established himself outside the city, and waited to see what would happen, plainly hoping that the destruction which had been unaccountably delayed might yet come.

Meanwhile a gourd grew up and shaded him from the sun. Next day it died, and he deeply resented the loss of his shelter. Whereupon God pointed out to him that he had *had pity on the gourd* which had sprung up in a night without costing anyone anything, and yet was angry because God had pity on *Nineveh that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle.*

It is implied that he cared for the gourd because it was of personal benefit to himself. But as his

[1] Tarshish, which was probably on the site occupied by the modern city of Seville, was the end of the world known to the Jews.

personal reputation as a prophet depended upon the destruction of Nineveh, he was prepared to exult over the loss of thousands of human lives. It is a very subtle portrait of a proud, hard, self-centred man.

The key to the book is the episode of the fish, which must be read in conjunction with two verses from Jeremiah, Ch. 51. *Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon, hath devoured me . . . he hath swallowed me up like a dragon, he hath filled his belly with my delicates, he hath cast me out* (v. 34[1]).

2. *And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up* (v. 44).

Now the meaning becomes clear. The Exile is depicted as the swallowing of Israel by a huge monster. He is, however, unable to retain what he has swallowed, and casts it out of his mouth. This is the Return, when the Jewish nation, which had apparently vanished for ever, reappeared once more in its own land.

Jonah stands for the Jewish people. The word means *Dove*, and the author may have selected it in irony, because the characteristics attributed to a dove are the exact opposite of those which he was attacking in his countrymen.

Or his choice may have been due to the fact that the historical Jonah abetted Jeroboam II., King of Israel, in his vindictive and aggressive wars. He might therefore be considered to represent the Jewish national temper at its very worst.

The book is a satire upon the Jewish people. Its point is that Israel has been marvellously restored,

not for its own sake, but that it may discharge a world-wide mission. The mission includes even Assyria. The ancient and implacable enemy of Israel is not outside the scope of God's mercy. The parable is not the less effective because Nineveh had been a ruin for more than three hundred years when it was written.

But the hard and selfish pride of the Jews was leading them to neglect this task. Their attitude towards the Gentile world was one of hatred and contempt. They were assuming that their restoration was a reward for their own merits, instead of an opportunity for serving God upon a larger scale. Their temper had become such that they would prefer anything to execution of the noble duty to which God had called them.

It probably never occurred to the author that any one would imagine the story to be history. If it were history, its religious value would be very slight. If the episode of the fish were meant to be taken literally, what are we intended to learn from it? It would be of no benefit to us to know that God once worked a miracle of that kind. We are surrounded with many far worthier and more convincing proofs of His Love and Power.

Rightly understood *Jonah* rises as high as anything in the Old Testament. We do not know who the writer was, nor can we fix his date. But if more of his countrymen could have accepted his interpretation of their national history our Lord might have been spared the tears which He shed when He beheld Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LATER PROPHETS (*continued*)

It is not easy to find any standpoint from which to treat the Prophetic Literature as a single whole. The fifteen books which have come down to us are the work of at least seventeen different hands, and cover a period of little less than five hundred years.

Yet in spite of the very wide differences between them there are certain characteristics common to them all.

1. *The direct claim to Divine Inspiration.*

In some cases (*e.g.* that of Isaiah) the circumstances of the Call are described. Where not described a Divine Call is assumed as an unquestionable fact. The Hebrew Prophets do not make suggestions or offer opinions. They speak because they must in the Name of God, in tones of unshakable conviction. They have no doubt from what Source their message has come, and therefore no uncertainty as to its value.

No bolder claim has ever been made. Where a similar claim has been put forward by later authors—such as Mahomet and the modern German philosopher Nietzsche—we may suspect that it would not have occurred to them to make it if the Hebrew Prophets had not done so first.

Both Mahomet and Nietzsche believed that they had a message for the world very different from anything to be found in the Bible. Each seems to have felt instinctively that his views had little chance of winning acceptance unless an equal degree of authority were claimed for them. Both were acquainted with the Old Testament, and the tone which they adopted must be regarded as a tribute to its power. They ape the style of the Prophets whom they believed themselves to be superseding.

It is sometimes asked—In what respect does the Inspiration of the Hebrew Prophets differ from that of other great writers of antiquity?

A part at least of the difference lies in the attitude of the Hebrew writers towards their inspiration. Plato may have been inspired, but he gives no hint that he was aware of it. Isaiah and Jeremiah knew that they were inspired, and said so very plainly. Conscious and unconscious inspiration cannot be regarded as exactly parallel. In the former case the writer shoulders a much heavier responsibility.

All the Hebrew Prophets lay claim to the fullest Divine Authority for their words, and the conscience of more than seventy generations of readers supports them. Their claim has not been endorsed by men of their own race only, who might be held to have been influenced by national pride. It has been, and still is, admitted by men to whom the very name of *Jew* stands for everything despicable and odious.

We cannot dismiss lightly a claim which has been so widely accepted for so long. It cannot be challenged on the strength of any individual opinion.

2. *The very keen perception of Moral Values.*

Reference to this has been made in a former chapter. It is one of the general characteristics of the Old Testament. But it is even more marked in the Prophets than in the Narrative books.

The Prophets are profoundly conscious of an immense and eternal difference between Right and Wrong. No argument about it can ever be possible. They are never tired of denouncing Wrong with a flaming heat of anger whatever form it may assume. Sometimes the principal object of attack is directly religious. In theory, Jehovah was the only God of Israel. But before the Exile various forms of idolatry were continually practised openly, and the only protest came from the Prophets.

Beside attacks upon downright idolatry we find powerful invective directed against indifference, formalism, and hypocrisy in religion.

The tendency to make religion a series of transactions with God was always strong. The comfortable belief that provided certain ceremonies were duly observed all must necessarily be well between Man and his Maker was even more widely held then than it is now. The Hebrew Prophets were almost the only people in the ancient world who dared to challenge it. They had the courage and spiritual insight to declare that in God's sight the number and costliness of our offerings makes no difference. Whatever they may be, they are worthless unless they proceed from or lead to a change of heart—*Will the Lord be pleased*, says Micah, *with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit*

*of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* [1]

The Prophets are also quick to denounce Social Injustice. They are the Champions of the Poor, and perhaps the first champions which the poor have ever possessed.

Religious and social reformers have looked to them for inspiration ever since. If it would be an exaggeration to say that their fiery eloquence has been the mainspring of every important religious or social reforming movement which Europe has seen for the last thousand years, it would certainly be difficult to point to one which owes nothing to them.

Beside attacking religious and social abuses, the Prophets carry their sense of moral values into Politics.

They declare that Politics are not a mere matter of expediency, and are perhaps the only people who have ever done so. There is nothing in which their attitude differs more entirely from that of our world.

When confronted with difficult political questions the Prophets do not try to balance profit and loss. They are sublimely contemptuous of the prospective advantages or drawbacks of any proposal. They maintain that political questions, like all others, depend upon eternal principles. In his dealings with foreign Powers the Statesman need only concern himself with one question—What is the Will of God in the matter?

[1] Ch. 6. vv. 7, 8.

It is impossible to imagine any modern political assembly meeting to deliberate in that spirit. But who can picture what would happen if (were it only for a single week) the House of Commons were to declare that it had no object save to ascertain and carry out the Will of God, and were to shew itself to be uninfluenced by any other consideration whatever?

If Jeremiah's prophetic activity had lain between the years 1840 and 1880 in England it is interesting to speculate as to what he might have said about our refusal to save Denmark and France from the claws of Prussia. And still more interesting to speculate what the world would be like now if he had gained a hearing.

It might also have been worth our while had we been able to hear Isaiah upon the alliance between England and Japan.

The Prophets maintain that moral considerations are the only ones which matter. They must dominate every human activity. All political and social systems must be built upon them. It belongs to religion to preserve them unimpaired. The modern world is coming very slowly to appreciate the truth of this view. We are beginning to realize what havoc we have worked by ignoring it. "Social problems" at home and wars abroad spring from the same root. They spring from the fact that we have disregarded moral considerations in the ordering of our affairs, and have allowed ourselves to be swayed by base motives of various kinds. The outcome has been a civilization which is falling to pieces about us.

Recognition of this fact is not confined to Christians. It is admitted by many who are contemptuous of

Divine Authority, and look to no sanction higher than the dictates of common-sense and of practical expediency.

But if we find that a handful of Hebrew preachers had grasped, more than two thousand years ago, principles which the nations of Europe are only now dimly perceiving, under pressure of bitter experience, to be true, we can hardly challenge their claim to Divine Inspiration. If unerring insight into spiritual principles does not constitute inspiration, what meaning can be attached to the word?

To many people, however, the Inspiration of a Prophet may seem to demand a somewhat different test. His function is to foretell the future, and therefore we need only ask—Did his prophecies come true? If they did, no more can be said. He has given proof of supernatural powers, and we must accept him at his own valuation. But if they did not, we must discount his estimate of himself considerably. We need not set him down as a deliberate impostor, but he was mistaken. He may have been honest, but he was not quite so highly gifted as he supposed.

We have therefore to consider how far this test is to be applied to the Hebrew Prophets. If we find it to be applicable, we must go on to take account of the results which it yields.

The Jewish conception of a *Prophet* was not quite the same as our own. The Jews counted *Prophetic* some books of the Bible which we count *Historical.* In their eyes a prophet was not necessarily concerned with the future only. He was a man who spoke in God's Name and proclaimed God's Will. His utterances might bear upon the future, or might

not. He was a Preacher of Righteousness more than what we ordinarily understand by a *Prophet.*

The simple test—Did his prophecies come true?—is therefore of limited application only. It has a certain validity which is freely admitted by the Prophets themselves.[1] The fullest acceptance of it is to be found in Amos—*Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets.*[2]

But it does not cover the whole of a *Prophet's* activity. We cannot say that a *Prophet*, as the Bible uses the title, stands or falls entirely by his power of foretelling the future.

The Hebrew Prophets do, however, sometimes speak of the future, and always in tones of singular confidence. We must therefore consider what bearing this has upon our theory of their inspiration.

Put shortly, the question amounts to this—Did God make plain to them the course of future events as He does not do to other people? Is this at least a part of what we mean when we call them *Inspired?*

At one time any Christian to whom these questions were put would have had no hesitation in answering Yes. Probably there are many who would not hesitate now. But a little reflection will shew us that so simple an answer is beset with serious difficulties. It may conceivably be the right answer. But it certainly cannot be given without hesitation.

We cannot imagine that Divine Inspiration can be of anything but advantage to mankind. If words have any meaning at all, it must be good for a man to be inspired by God. It must be good for anyone to listen to the utterances of an Inspired Preacher.

[1] *E.g.* Jeremiah, ch. 23; ch. 28. v. 9. [2] Ch. 3. v. 7.

But would it be good for us, could it be good for anyone, to have exact and detailed knowledge of the future? It would gratify our curiosity to have the future unrolled before us like a map, but what would be the *moral* effect upon our character? It is hard to see how it could be of any real advantage, and there are grounds for thinking that in many ways it would be bad.

1. It would remove Faith, and all that goes with Faith, from our lives altogether. Faith can only begin where sight ends. When we are in the presence of a certainty there is no place left for it. Faith, Hope, and Courage can only exist when we do not know what the end will be. They are born of uncertainty, and can only exist as long as uncertainty exists.

No credit would be due to a soldier for any courage which he might shew in action if he knew for certain either that he would or would not survive. If he knew that nothing could kill him that day he would be unaffected by any danger. If, on the other hand, he knew that he could not escape, why should he falter in the face of any risk?

We admire his courage because he does not know whether each moment is to be his last. The fact that he does not know is what constitutes him brave.

Again—What is there for which to hope, if we know what must be? We can only hope because we see certain different possibilities, one of which we desire.

But we must at least hesitate before we count anything which would make Faith, Hope, and Courage impossible to be a Divine Gift.

2. It would rob all the decisions which we are ever called to make of a very large part of their moral significance. If we knew for certain exactly what consequences would flow from any choice, the task of choosing would be much simpler than it is at present. It would really become superfluous ever to pray to God for guidance. We should know enough to be able to decide for ourselves.

Uncertainty is often painful. But its disciplinary value is plain. If there were no element of uncertainty as to the future when we have to make a decision, moral and spiritual growth would become very nearly impossible. Certainly the stature which we may attain now would be beyond our reach.

3. We may even go a step further and say that we should have no real choice at all. We might seem to have, but it would be illusion. For if the future can be exactly known it means that events can only follow one course, which has been already prescribed. It cannot alter, and therefore cannot be affected by anything which we do now.

But a choice which does not and cannot make any difference is not a real choice. No moral responsibility can attach to it. We may seem to ourselves to be choosing, but in reality we are doing nothing of the kind.

To take a simple illustration. If I know for certain that some particular thing must befall me on a certain day at a certain place, I know that I *must* be at that place at the time appointed. When the time comes for me to proceed thither I may seem to myself to have to decide whether I will start or not. But in fact there is no decision for me to make. It has been

decided for me already, and I can no more help going than I can help being older to-morrow than I am to-day.

Just in as far as the future can be exactly known it must be fore-ordained. Just in as far as it has been fore-ordained, human responsibility in the present ceases.

4. We have here touched upon a very large subject, namely, the question of Divine Fore-knowledge and Human Free-will. It would be out of place to attempt any formal discussion of it here. It is enough to say that all logic is against Free-will, and all experience is for it.

We cannot reconcile the two halves of the paradox. On the one hand God must (so far as we can see) foreknow. On the other, if we know anything we know that we have (and must have) power of choice.

(The Christian Religion lays more stress upon Human Free-will than does the Religion of the Old Testament, because it has a keener sense of the value of the individual soul.)

There are therefore good grounds for holding that if exact knowledge of the future were imparted to us it would not be to the moral advantage of mankind. But as a Divine gift can only be a blessing to all concerned, our first simple theory of what it meant to be a Prophet must be too small. It invests him with power of inflicting injury upon us so subtle and so far-reaching that we should be compelled to ascribe his inspiration to the Devil.

We may even question (with all reverence) whether God *could* impart to us exact knowledge of the future.

By creating the world He has been pleased to place Himself under certain limitations. These limitations are not part of His essential Being. They only exist by virtue of His own Will, and they are only for a time. They only touch His relationship to this world, and will therefore, we believe, pass when it passes. But for us now they stand. Chief of them we count the fact that He has made us His creatures capable of disobeying His Will and of thwarting it. Whether we are capable of hindering His purposes for ever we cannot tell. Nor does the point immediately concern us. What does concern us is that we can hinder them here and now for the term of our lives on earth.

We might have perceived that unaided, though of ourselves we might have hesitated to affirm it positively. But any doubt on the point has been resolved by the fact that our Lord has taught us to pray—*Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.*

That petition has no meaning if the fulfilment of God's Will here and now be certain. It would be futile to pray for a foregone conclusion. The words must mean that we are able to set forward God's Will, or to thwart it, as we choose.

If we possess that power there is no exact map of the future which could be unrolled before our eyes.

When the Prophets speak of the future their predictions are for the most part of a general character. And in most cases they are subject to a condition, implied or expressed.

Their substance is—" Disaster will come if you go on as you are doing now. But if you repent the blow will be averted."

Sometimes the repentance has been too long delayed, and nothing but disaster will produce it. But usually there is, admittedly, a prospect that the prophecy will not be fulfilled. The most conspicuous example is the Book of Jonah. The fact that the book is not history makes no difference. It shews how prophecies were regarded by the Jews themselves. They were warnings of what was very likely to happen rather than positive statements of what *must* happen.

(Isaiah's prediction to Hezekiah,[1] that he would not only recover from his present illness, but would live for another fifteen years, is an exception. But the strange natural phenomenon which accompanied this prophecy marks it as altogether abnormal.)

A difficulty may be felt here with regard to the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in the Life of our Lord. Especial stress is laid upon this feature in the first and fourth Gospels.

The impression left upon the reader is certainly that the Evangelists regarded the Prophets as having foreseen certain incidents (some of them not, to our thinking, of especial importance) in our Lord's Life.

Something more will be said upon this head later. But it would take us too far afield to attempt any general discussion of the use made of the Old Testament by the writers of the New. But as there is no attempt to make out that the Prophets foretold *every* event in our Lord's life, it is not irreverent to allow something for what we call coincidence. Certain incidents recalled familiar passages from the Old Testament.

[1] Isaiah, ch. 38. vv. 5-8; cf. also 2 Kings, ch. 20. v. 7.

When we find an appropriate quotation from any classic and apply it to a contemporary event, we do not suggest that it was originally written in anticipation of that event.

It may be that in order to help the imagination of His followers our Lord did sometimes deliberately lend Himself to the fulfilment of prophecy. That is to say, He said and did things which were meant to help them to see that despite His difference from the Messiah of traditional expectation He was in fact the Redeemer of whom the Prophets had spoken.

And the Evangelists may have laid more stress than He Himself intended upon this aspect of His Life. It was one which would naturally appeal strongly to them, and to the whole early Jewish-Christian circle.

He did not regard Himself as going through an unalterably prescribed routine. Nor is it possible that His followers should have so regarded Him.

For in that case His Life would have been automatic, and of no value to us. It would be worth nothing either as an Example or as the Means of Redemption. Its unique, supreme Value and Saving Power lie in the fact that it was throughout a Life of voluntary obedience to the Father. He held a certain course without faltering, not because He could have held no other, but because He chose. The value of that course to the world is not really increased by the fact that certain incidents in it recalled to those who witnessed them certain passages from the Scriptures. But this correspondence made it easier for the Apostles to grasp the significance of what was being enacted before them. It was so

unlike what they had expected that they needed all the help which they could get.

We conclude, therefore, that we ought not to make infallible knowledge of the future the supreme test of the Prophets' Inspiration. Their title rests rather upon their grasp of spiritual principles *in the present.* They could see more clearly than ordinary men what was really going on. Beneath the confused eddies on the surface they perceived whither the main stream was flowing. And their very vivid sense of the Presence and Power and Justice of God assured them that He would scourge sin by whomsoever it might be committed. They recognized that He might use a heathen nation to punish His own people. But the pride and ruthlessness which made that nation the scourge in His Hand would sooner or later meet with its own reward. The punishment might be heavy, but there was always a background of hope, because God would not cast off His Chosen altogether.

Any abnormal insight into the future which they possessed was (with perhaps one or two isolated exceptions) incidental. It was merely one outcome of their abnormal grasp of spiritual principles, and of their vivid realization of God's Character in the present.

It will not be out of place to cite a modern parallel for illustration. When Prussia defeated France in 1870-1 the sympathies of most people in England were upon the German side. Our Royal Family had intimate ties with more than one Royal German House. We suspected Napoleon III. of hostile designs, and France was still, in spite of the Crimea, the hereditary enemy. We were not sorry to see her humbled, and we seem to have been inclined to regard

her defeat as a Divine Judgment upon a godless and immoral people.

But Dean Church of St. Paul's said that he thought that the result would be that the German people would cease to contribute anything of real value to the world's inheritance, and would be transformed into a military despotism which in another generation might become a danger to the whole of Europe.

(I am obliged to quote from memory, and cannot give the reference. But the passage can be found in his published writings.)

Such political sagacity, springing from a deeply spiritual interpretation of history, recalls at once the Prophets of the Old Testament. It indicates a mind of exceptional calibre and spiritual equipment capable of piercing below the surface of events. The possessor is a living example of the picture painted by Isaiah of the man upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rests who *shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.*[1]

We do not claim for the English Dean a degree of inspiration equal to that of the Hebrew Prophets. For this reason. His opportunities of acquiring the knowledge needed for such a judgment were much greater. Sources of inspiration and enlightenment which they did not possess were open to him.

He had behind him the wider and fuller spiritual knowledge which the Christian Revelation, endorsed by centuries of Christian experience, had given to the world. We ought to be able to interpret history spiritually, and to recognize the supreme importance of the moral factor, because we know more of God.

[1] Ch. xi. v. 3.

Also, printing and facilities for travel have made it easier for us than it could be for anyone in the ancient world to gain an insight into the tendencies and characteristics of neighbouring nations. We have much more material upon which to base our judgments.

But any material which Dean Church had before him was equally available for any Englishman at the time. Anyone might (presumably) have formed a similar judgment. But apparently no one else did.

But if only one Christian Englishman could take a prophetic view of a great European war the spiritual eminence and insight of the Hebrew Prophets is thrown into sharper relief.

It is worth while to make an effort of imagination and to try to put ourselves in their place. What would have been our grasp of the politics of Western Asia between the eighth and fifth centuries B.C.? If we had been citizens of either of the tiny Hebrew Kingdoms should we have been quite certain that behind the tramp of passing armies and the rise and fall of mighty Empires a *moral* purpose was slowly being fulfilled?

Yet there is one respect in which the insight of the Prophets into the future has no analogy in later times. It must be of supreme importance in Christian eyes, though it may not be of much interest in any other. I mean—Their anticipation of the coming of Christ.

This is a matter upon which Christian opinion has changed very much of late years. Formerly the question was regarded as extremely simple. It was assumed that the Prophets, because they were Prophets, were endowed with miraculous knowledge

of the distant future. They saw Christ and spoke of Him in language which, if perplexing at the moment, was explained in the fulness of time by His Life.

But our closer study of the Bible has led us to question this assumption.

It seems to us doubtful whether there is any reason to suppose that God imparts to men knowledge which can mean nothing until centuries after they are dead.[1] And we see that some of the utterances which were held to apply directly to the Life of Christ only are at least capable of another interpretation. They relate to events much nearer the Prophet's own time: a fact which must have enhanced their value when they were delivered.

It will be enough to take two outstanding passages for purposes of illustration.

1. The Prophecy of Isaiah to Ahaz. (Isaiah, ch. 7. vv. 10-16.)

A Christian turn has been given to this passage by the translation of verse 14—*Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.* But the word does not necessarily mean a virgin. It is simply a young woman, and might perfectly well be applied to a young wife.

The point of the passage is that the invasion of the land of Judah by Rezin, King of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel, the prospect of which was filling Ahaz with dismay, was not to be dreaded. It would come to nothing, and his enemies would not remain upon their thrones for many years. Before a child, not yet born, has reached years of discretion their place will know them no more. *For before the child shall*

[1] See ch. 3, "The Books of Moses."

*know to refuse the evil and to choose the good the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.* (v. 16.)

(It is worth while to add that there was never any expectation that Messiah should be born of a Virgin. Every Jewish wife hoped that He might be among her descendants.)

2. The picture of the Suffering Servant of God. (Isaiah, ch. 52. v. 13 onwards.)

It is clear to us now that the thought in the writer's mind was of the Nation, which he personifies as an individual. He is writing after the Exile, and his point is that the national martyrdom has not been mere waste. Israel has suffered much, and may have more to suffer yet. But these sufferings have a redemptive, purifying value.

I do not mean that the application which Christian feeling has given to these and similar passages is in any way illegitimate. But we cannot affirm that any such application was in the writers' minds. They had a message from God for their countrymen; but it was a message primarily for their own day, not for the distant future.

But if the Prophets did not foresee Christ in the way in which they were once assumed to have done, are we to say that they did not point to Him in any sense? If we are driven to such a conclusion our position will become very difficult with regard to the tenor of much of the teaching of the New Testament. Much of our religious thought will need complete revision in what now seem to be some of its fundamentals.

For my own part, I do not think that this difficulty arises. I believe that the Prophets did prepare the

way for Christ, and that they did so more effectually than former generations of Christians had perceived.

One very early and very widely diffused religious conception of the Hebrews was belief in what is called *the day of the Lord.* We do not know how or when the belief grew up, and that does not matter. The point is that it did exist. This is proved by the fact that the Prophets refer to it without a word of explanation. It was plainly something with which they all knew their readers to be familiar.[1]

It was expected at some undefined time in the future, and by tradition it was to be a time of happiness and reward. The Prophets never question the belief that it would come. But in many cases they say that when it dawns it will not be what is expected. Their message may be summarized—"The day of the Lord is indeed coming. It is nearer at hand than you suppose. But when it comes, it will not be what you imagine. Instead of a day of reward for your goodness, it will be a day of stern judgment for your sins. But when your sins have been expiated by heavy punishment, and you have repented of them, God will turn and be gracious unto His people."

There is probably no nation which does not look back to an imaginary Golden Age. The Hebrews had theirs enshrined in the myth of *Eden the Garden of God*, which had been lost to mankind for ever. But unlike other nations who have held similar beliefs, they looked forward to a Golden Age to come. This was destined to surpass Eden itself. Any lan-

[1] *E.g.* Joel, ch. 2. vv. 1 and 2; Amos, ch. 8. vv. 9-13; Obadiah, 15; Micah, ch. 4, vv. 1-8; Zephaniah, ch. 1. vv. 14-18.

guage which could be used about the Golden Past was applicable to the Golden Future, and would fall short of the reality.

How this expectation came to exist does not concern us now. It did exist, and the Prophets laid hold of it. The references to it in their writings are very numerous, and it is plain that they are dwelling upon an already familiar theme.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the value of this hope to the Hebrews. During all the calamitous periods of their stormy history it did more than anything else could have done to keep them a nation and to preserve their consciousness that they had still a national destiny before them.

It helps, perhaps more than we know, to keep them a nation now. For more than eighteen centuries they have had neither city nor country of their own. They have been the despised outcasts of the world, the supreme national failure. But one of the articles in the nearest approach to a creed possessed by the Jewish Church of to-day runs thus—*I believe with perfect faith that Messiah cometh, and though he tarry, yet I wait daily for his coming.*

From time to time the form of the hope underwent variations. Sometimes it was regarded as an era of undefined length. Sometimes the expectation was of the personal rule of a Prince of the House of David. The conception of this Person also varies somewhat. He may be regarded primarily as a Prince, or primarily as a Prophet, or primarily as a Priest. It is doubtful whether he was ever expected to combine all three characters. But however regarded, the same title is applied to him, namely, *Messiah.* The word

*Messiah*[1] means *The Anointed One*, and was given to him because he would hold a special commission from God.

His reign (or what we may call *The Messianic Era*, as the period was not always conceived as the reign of an individual) was not to be merely a time of material prosperity. It was to include that, and was of course to bring political independence when that had been lost. But it was to be something more, something which was known as *The Kingdom of God*. The nation was to stand closer to God than it had ever done before; sometimes there seems even to have been an expectation that He would dwell visibly among them, and Righteousness was to be supreme as never yet.

It is true that the conception of Righteousness is limited, and the idea that the Kingdom must be set up in the first instance by force of arms never evaporates entirely. But that is only another way of saying that the hope does not rise to an entirely Christian level.

During the period between the Old and New Testaments the hope increased, and sometimes assumed forms which strike us as fantastic. It was a theme on which the luxuriant imagination of the Jews could run riot, and it may be that the whole of the picture which was sometimes drawn was not always meant to be taken absolutely seriously.

But in its main lines the idea of a *Kingdom of God* upon earth did not vary, and was for centuries the inspiration of the Jewish people.

Of this hope our Lord laid hold. It gave Him a starting point which was, humanly speaking, invalu-

[1] Christ is simply the equivalent of the Hebrew *Messiah*.

able, and could not have been provided by anything else.

He began His public Ministry with the words—*The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand.*[1]

That would have meant nothing to anyone who was not a Jew. But to any Jew it meant a very great deal. It was a challenge which he could not possibly ignore. It was the boldest claim which human lips could make. The attention of all who heard it would be caught at once, and they would naturally begin to ask—Who is this who dares to thrust himself forward in such fashion? Has he the power to make so tremendous a claim good?

We know that our Lord was not the kind of Messiah which the Jews had come to expect. So little did He resemble the traditional portrait that many who were at one time ready to follow Him fell away in disappointment. Even the faith of John the Baptist wavered once. And finally He provoked the remorseless animosity of those who ought to have been the first to welcome Him.

Yet He continually maintained that He was the Figure of Whom the Prophets had spoken. And as we look back upon it now we can see the truth of His words. What other true fulfilment, what other fulfilment really worth having at all, could there possibly have been?

A kingdom which owed its origin to force, which relied in the least degree upon force for its maintenance, could have been at best but an indifferent mirror of the Mind of God. It would not have been entirely His. And it might always have been over-

[1] St. Mark, ch. 1. v. 15.

thrown by force at any future time. What force has created, other force may destroy. What owes nothing to force is invulnerable against attack from without. It can only perish by corruption from within.

If the Jews had managed to keep their political independence, what would it have been worth? A small Jewish State with its capital at Jerusalem could never have been a very important factor in the history of the world.

It is probable that all the Prophets did look forward to the independence of their race. In their eyes that was an indispensable preliminary to the establishment of the rule of righteousness. In that we know that they were mistaken. But the mistake was a natural one. It has been shared for many centuries by the Roman Church, which still appears to believe that the Church cannot do its work properly unless its visible Head upon earth is an independent Sovereign Prince.

But if the Prophets were mistaken, their mistake was merely upon a side issue. It only concerned the way in which the *Kingdom of God* was to be set up. It did not involve the fact that there was to be such a Kingdom. That is the essential point. That was the hope upon which our Lord laid hold. He began where they had left off. He took all the aspirations which they had nurtured, expanded them into something much nobler, and translated that expansion into fact.

It would not be true to say that the Prophets definitely foresaw Him. We ought not to imagine that they ever had His actual Figure, or anything

resembling it, before their eyes. We believe that the study of the Bible has shewn us that God does not inspire men in that kind of way, and His Figure would have been incomprehensible to them if they had seen It.

Details of His Life which recalled to those who saw them passages from the Prophets are not to be regarded as more than coincidences. They are not of the first importance, and our belief that our Lord was what He professed to be does not rest upon them.

But it is true that the Prophets prepared the way for Christ. They spoke of a Kingdom which should be unlike all others. It was to rest upon a new intimacy between God and Man, and its law was to be nothing save the eternal Righteousness of God.

They did not, it seems, create this hope in the first instance. But they branded it indelibly upon the hearts of their countrymen.

When the reality came, it was not what they had pictured. It was far better than anything of which they had dreamed. But if they had not dreamed and hoped there could have been no reality. The Kingdom of God *could* not have been set up anywhere save in Judea, because nowhere else had any foundations for it been laid.

The foundations were well and truly laid by the Hebrew Prophets, though the completed design of the Master Builder was beyond their vision.

Those who believe that the Christian Church is God's instrument for the Salvation of the world, not a chance growth, but a definite stage in the fulfilment of the Divine Purpose, cannot overlook the way in which the Prophets prepared for it. Humanly

speaking, they made it possible. They were the agents by whose means God had designed to bring it about.

If we find that the writings of a body of men prepared the way for the Christian Church, how can we doubt that those men are rightly described as *Inspired Prophets?*

We do not look first at details. It is not worth while to take the incidents of our Lord's life upon earth one by one, and to try to make each fit some passage of the ancient Scriptures. Our concern is with the broad, general outcome of the Prophet's work. And we can see that they did in very truth lay the foundations of Christ's Kingdom. They provided Him with a starting-point. They had kept alive in the world religious ideals so lofty that nothing less than the Incarnation of the Son of God could have translated them into fact. The fulfilment was not what they had foreseen. It was far larger than anything of which they could have dreamed. They did not know how splendid the structure which God proposed to build upon their foundations would be. But the foundations were of their laying. What better outcome could there be of any form or degree of *Inspiration* which it is possible for human beings to receive? Who can doubt that the Holy Ghost spoke by men whose words have come to mean so much to the entire world?

## CHAPTER VII

### THE WRITINGS

The third division of the Scriptures recognized by the Jews comprises whatever was not included in The Law or The Prophets. It consists of the following books—The Chronicles, The Psalms, The Song of Solomon, The Lamentations of Jeremiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Esther, Job, and Daniel. These works were known collectively as *The Writings*. The nature of their contents varies so widely that it would be difficult to find any more exact descriptive title to cover them all.

In the copy of the English Bible before me at the moment they occupy 216 pages, as against the 189 of The Law and the 341 of The Prophets. They make up therefore a little less than one third of the whole bulk of the Old Testament.

*The Writings* are regarded by the Jews as Scripture, but were considered to stand upon a lower level. They did not rank with The Law or The Prophets, and they are less frequently quoted by the New Testament writers. Though Inspired they were treasured as of a lesser degree of Inspiration.

It is a matter for regret that the Church as a whole (and particularly the Church of England) has been

unwilling to draw the distinction between the inspiration of different parts of the Old Testament which was drawn as a matter of course by all the first circle of Christians.[1]

The simplest method of classifying the collection is by the nature of the contents.

Six of the books are history (Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ruth, and Esther). Four are poetry (Psalms, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and Job), of which Job differs considerably from the other three. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes may be described as *Wisdom Literature*, and are semi-poetical. They have obvious affinities with the books Wisdom and Ecclesiastes in the Apocrypha.

In England we have never produced anything exactly parallel with the Wisdom Literature of the East. Amongst the Jews, as amongst other Oriental people, the Wise Man possessed a recognized status. He did not rank with the Law-giver or with the Prophet, and would not himself have claimed their inspiration. His message is the outcome of meditation and (if possible) of travel. He is a Philosopher who has pondered much upon human life and conduct, and wishes to give to the world the benefit of his reflections. He does not speak with the force and fire of the Prophet, but what he lacks in intensity he may make up in breadth of outlook. He is not distinctively and exclusively Hebrew. He existed

[1] Anyone who has had any experience of open-air preaching knows how deeply rooted is the conviction that the Church is bound to regard every part of the Bible as of equal value. Half the attacks upon Christianity made by the *Rational Press Association* start from this assumption.

among the Greeks—Solon and Theognis are examples —but is, perhaps, not to be found anywhere else in Europe.

The book of Daniel stands by itself, and must be discussed separately.

The two books of the Chronicles cover the period from the death of Saul to the final destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. They are anonymous, and are probably by more than one hand.

Prefixed to the narrative is an elaborate genealogy of the Israelites from Adam, and the second book closes with an appendix of two verses recording the permission to return to Jerusalem granted to the Jews by Cyrus. Thus the period dealt with has already been covered in the two books of the Kings.

But the story is told from a somewhat different standpoint. The books of the Chronicles bear throughout the stamp of the ecclesiastical historian. Their principal object is not to record the national history of the Hebrews so much as to glorify the Temple and everything belonging to it. They emphasize the fact that piety is always duly rewarded, while impiety and disregard of the Temple ordinances always meet with condign punishment.

In places, as in the great prayers of David[1] and of Solomon,[2] the level reached is a high one. But as history the books are undoubtedly biassed and less trustworthy than those of the Kings.

The genealogy of the Israelites, which occupies eight chapters, is in all probability fictitious. It is intended to give literary completeness to the whole narrative.

[1] 1 Chron. ch. 29. vv. 10-19. [2] 2 Chron. ch. 6. vv. 14-42.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are of a different quality. There is no reason to doubt that they are thoroughly trustworthy history. They deal with the second return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem in the middle of the fifth century.

The first return, under Joshua the son of Jozadak and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, had been in 538. The story is told in the first six chapters of Ezra. The Temple had been rebuilt and some of its vessels had been restored,[1] but with that the first enthusiasm had spent itself, and little progress had been made with the rebuilding of the city. In spite of the Temple the Law was not strictly observed, and mixed marriages were common. It is plain that a fresh Religious Revival was necessary, and it was the work of Ezra and Nehemiah to bring this about. They had behind them the goodwill of Artaxerxes, who seems to have been genuinely well disposed towards his Jewish subjects. This did much towards removing difficulties which might otherwise have proved insuperable.

It is probable that amongst their reforms both Ezra and Nehemiah had something to do with the formation of the Canon of the Old Testament, that is, with settling what religious writings were to be regarded as pre-eminently Sacred and Inspired.

The Canon was not, however, finally completed until after their time.

It would be out of place to attempt to discuss here exactly what part they played in selecting and arranging the Old Testament Scriptures which we now possess.

[1] Ezra, ch. 6. v. 5.

(To later generations Ezra became an almost legendary figure, and two books of our Apocrypha (I. and II. Esdras) were fathered upon him. Both belong to a much later period. Part of II. Esdras shews marks of Christian influence, and was probably written between the years 90 and 100 A.D.)

Ruth and Esther are two short sketches of private episodes in Jewish history. The former belongs to the period of the Judges. The scene of the latter is the court of King Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes) in the fifth century. Their principal importance is for the light which they throw upon contemporary manners and customs. They are valuable as a contribution to our fragmentary knowledge of the history of the Jewish people. If we believe the Jews to have been chosen by God to discharge a special mission in the world, even slight sketches such as these have a claim upon our attention.

The moral tone of Ruth is superior to that of Esther,[1] in which the Name of God is never mentioned.

Of the purely poetical *Writings* the book of Psalms is the most important. Tradition ascribed it to King David, and it was sometimes called simply David.

Our words Psalm and Psalter are derived from the Greek. A Psalm is properly any composition intended to be sung to an accompaniment of stringed instruments, and any collection of such pieces is a Psalter. The words had originally no religious significance.

[1] The Greek version of Esther is longer than the Hebrew. Only the Hebrew portion of the story is included by us in the Old Testament. The concluding chapters are to be found in the Apocrypha.

The Hebrew title is *The Book of Praises.* Perhaps the best title for English readers is the one which has been suggested in a former chapter—*Hymns Ancient and Modern of the Jewish Church.*

The Psalter is not to be regarded as if it were a single book, or the work of a single hand. It is a collection of hymns by many different hands belonging to very different dates.

The division into five books was probably prompted by the fact that there were five books of the Law. But it seems to be arbitrary. The arrangement within each book is also unsystematic, though in places there is a rough attempt to classify the pieces by their contents.

We can see for ourselves that Psalm 1 forms an appropriate introduction to the whole collection, and that no other tailpiece as good as Psalm 150 could be found.

The majority of the psalms are of a private character. Like many of our hymns, they are the outcome of the personal religious experience of the writer. We do not know the authors' names, and can only imagine their circumstances from what they wrote. But there is no more vivid record of spiritual experience to be found outside the New Testament. Faith and Hope, Thankfulness and the joy of God's Presence, Repentance and the craving for Forgiveness have never inspired a nobler hymn-book.

Some psalms are historical, and recall God's wonderful works of old time. They speak of the great deliverance from Egypt, or of the help which He extended to David in his need. Others refer to public events of more recent date, though there is perhaps

only one which can be identified with absolute certainty.

Psalm 137 can only have been written shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem, while the memory of all that they had lost was still fresh in the minds of the Exiles.

But there are other cases in which, if we can only guess, we may venture to say that our guess is a probable one. A few examples will be sufficient.

1. Psalm 45 is an ode for a Royal Marriage. The references to the *ivory palaces* in v. 8 and to *the daughter of Tyre* in v. 12 immediately suggest Ahab, King of Israel. We are told that Ahab *made an ivory house* (1 Kings, ch. 22. v. 39), and he had connections with Phoenicia through his Zidonian wife Jezebel.

It is therefore tempting to assume that the occasion is the marriage between his daughter and Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. It would have been natural to found high hopes upon such an alliance.

If our guess be right, this psalm is probably one of the oldest of the whole collection.

2. Psalm 118 was plainly written for a religious festival of a special character. Verses 19 and 20 suggest the arrival of a procession at the gate of some sanctuary, where other worshippers are waiting to receive them.

The occasion may have been the exceptionally solemn Passover which was held in the eighteenth year of Josiah, King of Judah, of which it is said *there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the Kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept.*[1]

[1] 2 Chronicles, ch. 35. v. 18.

3. Psalms 44, 79 and 80 are the product of some great political catastrophe. The Jews are under the heel of their enemies, and the Holy City itself has been defiled.

Yet the circumstances do not seem to fit the destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, as there is no reference to being carried into captivity into a foreign land.

It is usual to regard these psalms as belonging to the time of the Maccabees, when Antiochus Epiphanes made a great effort to compel his Jewish subjects to abandon their religion.

If so, they were not written before 186 B.C., and are as late as any part of the Old Testament.

Most of the psalms have titles prefixed to them, which are not reproduced in our Prayer-Book.

Sometimes these relate to authorship, *e.g. A Psalm of David* or *A Prayer of Moses the Man of God.* But such headings are of no real value as historical evidence. They are merely editorial notes added at a later date.

Some of them are obscure, and seem to be directions as to the tune to be played. Others may relate to the way in which that psalm was to be used in public worship.

Some of the psalms are very ancient. But I believe that competent Hebrew scholars are agreed that it is unlikely that any of them are as old as the time of David. It is almost certain that none of them are actually his own composition.

To many English readers the idea that none of the psalms are by the hand of David may be a surprise. It may seem to run counter to the direct statement of our Lord Himself. For in His discourse with the

Scribes [1] He quotes Psalm 110 as being the work of David, and the force of His argument appears at first sight to depend upon the Davidic authorship.

It may be urged that if David did not write this psalm our Lord's argument falls to the ground, and we are reduced to saying either that He made a mistake or that He used an argument which He Himself knew to be unsound, because it would serve to convince His audience.

Here we seem to be upon the horns of a dilemma. But we are not in reality compelled to accept either of these conclusions.

Our Lord's point was that the Scribes' conception of *Messiah* was too small. They thought of Him as the *son of David*, by which they understood no more than a Prince of David's line who should recover the independence of the nation by a victorious war, and then rule it from Jerusalem. They were right to speak of Him as the *son of David*. But the authority which gave them that right compelled them also to admit that He was *David's Lord*. That meant that He could not be *David's son* in the ordinary sense of the word. He must be something more beside.

The point of our Lord's argument is this. The authority for either statement is the same. If one be accepted, both must be.

Whether the authority for saying that *Messiah* is *David's Lord* be that of David himself or not makes no difference. Whatever it was, no one could be in a position to question it. It was the Inspired Scripture,

[1] St. Matt. ch. 22. vv. 41-45; St. Mark, ch. 12. vv. 35-37; St. Luke, ch. 20. vv. 39-44.

to whomsoever the hand which had actually penned the words might belong.

The Psalter stands in less need of apology than any other book of the Old Testament. It has won the heart of the Christian world as nothing else except the Gospel has ever done. The instinct which has given it a very large and prominent place in the public worship of the Church in all countries has been amply justified by experience.

It is due to the prominence of the Psalter in public worship that the Church of England possesses two versions, one in the Bible and one in the Prayer-Book.

When the Prayer-Book was compiled, the portions of Scripture incorporated in it were taken from what was called *The Great Bible*, which was then the latest English translation in existence. When the *Authorized Version* appeared some sixty years later the Prayer-Book version of the Psalms had become so familiar that it was thought better to make no change.

Something similar had happened some twelve hundred years before. When St. Jerome set to work upon the text of the Latin Bible his first act was to revise the Psalter. His version was adopted in the Church's services, and became so well known that his later translation (which came in due course as he worked his way through the Bible) never ousted it.

The mediaeval Church of Western Europe was accustomed to one version of the Psalms in the Prayer-Book and another in the Bible, as we in England are to-day.

In spite of their force and beauty the Psalms do not reach a Christian level. They contain little hope of any Life beyond the Grave, and their passionate

desire that the Righteousness of God may be manifested upon earth, while there is yet time, has led to expressions which give offence in some circles now. The point has been discussed in a former chapter, and for my own part I can only say that the offence seems to me to be needless. I do not think that it ought to arise when the background and outlook of the writers have been taken into account.

As long as men know what Sin means, and are conscious of the separation from God which it brings, so long as they know what is meant by Forgiveness and Repentance, the Psalms will never lose their power. As long as we hope and pray, and keep any sense of thankfulness to God for all His goodness towards us we shall turn again and again to the hymns of the Jewish Church in which our Lord Himself must often have joined.[1]

The *Song of Solomon*, or, as it is sometimes called, The *Song of Songs*, is a love poem. Much of the imagery is strange to Western ideas. The poem probably owes its place in the Old Testament to the fact that it was believed to have been written by Solomon himself. Christian interpreters have regarded it as an allegory, expressing the relationship of the Church to Christ. This view is preserved for English readers in the headings prefixed to the chapters in the *Authorized Version*.

This method of interpreting Scripture, by turning Narrative into Allegory, was in vogue amongst the

[1] There are grounds for thinking that the *hymn*, with which the Last Supper closed was Psalm 136. If so, the last words upon our Lord's lips as He left the house to begin His Passion were: *O give thanks unto the God of Heaven: for His mercy endureth for ever.*

Jews before the beginning of the Christian era. Traces of it appear in the New Testament, as when St. Paul treated the story of Abraham's two wives as an allegory of the Two Covenants.[1] It was developed by the Church of Alexandria and spread thence to the Latin-speaking Church of Western Europe.

It was at one time exceedingly popular, for as by means of it any passage can be made to bear almost any meaning which anyone can wish to put upon it, it provided a simple method for the removal of any difficulties which the Bible might present. But it takes no account of the historical circumstances of the writer, nor of what may have been his original meaning.

It is generally discredited now, and only deserves to be remembered as a curious chapter in the history of Bible-study.

The *Lamentations of Jeremiah* are an elegy upon the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

The poem is marked by a deep sense that the calamity is the just judgment of God upon a sinful people, and the purifying value of suffering is definitely recognized.

As emphasis has been laid upon the point that the Old Testament contains a great deal of poetry, it may be worth while to say something as to the principles upon which Hebrew poetry is constructed.

They have nothing in common with those with which we are familiar. Metre, which turns upon the number of syllables contained in each line, and rhyme were unknown to the Hebrews. In their eyes what

[1] Galatians, ch. 4. vv. 24-26.

constituted poetry was a certain balance or interchange of ideas, such as can easily be traced in the Psalms. In other words, to us poetry is primarily a matter of *form*. To us the difference between poetry and prose consists chiefly in the way in which the words are arranged.

To the Hebrews poetry was primarily a matter of *meaning*. To them it turned upon the sense of the passage more than upon its form. If the thoughts expressed in successive sentences balance each other in the proper way, these sentences are to be counted a verse of poetry. The number of words or syllables which they contain is of no importance.

The nearest approach to what we understand by metre ever made by the Hebrews was when they took pains to make each line or stanza begin with a particular letter of the alphabet. The best example of this is Psalm 119. It consists of twenty-two stanzas of eight verses each. In each stanza every verse begins with the same letter of the alphabet, and the whole alphabet is thus worked through in order.

The last twenty-two verses of the Book of Proverbs are constructed in the same way,[1] and traces of the same process are to be found elsewhere, notably in the *Lamentations of Jeremiah*.

Poetry constructed upon this principle suffers less by translation than the metrical pieces to which we are accustomed. Hebrew poetry remains poetry, according to Hebrew ideas, after it has been translated into another language because, if the translation be at all accurate, the balance of thought must necessarily be preserved.

[1] The Hebrew alphabet consists of twenty-two letters.

But it does not always occur to readers who are accustomed to think of metre as essential to poetry that what they have before them is intended to be anything but prose.

The *Book of Job* forms a link between the Poetical and Wisdom sections of *The Writings*. The speeches of Job and his friends are poetry, but they are also argument. They are poetry written for the purpose of instruction, and may therefore be regarded as a kind of half-way house between the Psalms and Ecclesiastes and Proverbs.

The first noticeable feature of the book is that Job is said to have lived in the *land of Uz, i.e.* not in Canaan. It is never suggested that he or his friends were Israelites. We are here dealing with something outside the main stream of Hebrew history, to which the rest of the Old Testament belongs.

The scene is laid in Patriarchal times. Job is, like Abraham, a dweller in tents, whose wealth is reckoned in flocks and herds. But there is no doubt that the author lived at a later period.

He is guilty of small anachronisms, as men always are when they try to write as if they were living in times other than their own. He reveals a state of society more settled than anything which could have existed in Job's day, and in one passage seems to have misunderstood a verse of Isaiah.[1] We have no

[1] Cf. Isaiah, ch. 19. v. 5 with Job, ch. 14. v. 11. Isaiah speaks of the failing of the waters of *the sea* (by which he means the Nile) as an exceptional catastrophe which would fall upon Egypt. Job speaks of it as a regular and inevitable phenomenon. Possibly he was acquainted with some coast where there is a regular rise and fall of tide.

means of fixing his name, but he must have been acquainted with Egypt. His description of mining operations[1] suggests that he had visited the gold-workings which lie to the westward of the Red Sea. *Behemoth*[2] and *Leviathan*[3] can only be the Hippopotamus and the Crocodile of the Nile Valley, and one passage may contain an allusion to the Pyramids.[4]

Incidentally he shews more appreciation of the Horse[5] than is customary in the Old Testament.

As the book stands now, it is probably the work of more than one hand. The speeches of Elihu[6] read like a later addition. They make a fresh contribution to the discussion, and are ignored in the answer of God with which the argument closes. Chapter 38 begins—*Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind*, which implies that Job has only just finished speaking, and looks back to the end of Chapter 31.

The date is in dispute. But it is unlikely that any part of the book was written much before 600 B.C. It may be considerably later.

Of Job himself we know nothing. But Ezekiel classes him with Noah and Daniel as a type of righteousness.[7] We may therefore conclude that by the middle of the sixth century B.C. he was a traditional figure of the past, whose sufferings and patience had become proverbial amongst the Jews.

The author of our book took the familiar story to form what may be called the Plot of the Drama. The Book of Job is not quite a drama as we understand the word, because there is no action upon the stage. The characters do not enter and leave. They

[1] Ch. 28. [2] Ch. 40. [3] Ch. 41. [4] Ch. 3. v. 14.
[5] Ch. 39. vv. 19-25. [6] Ch. 32-37. [7] Ch. 14. v. 14.

are all there at the beginning, and remain until the end. They merely make speeches in turn, and the calamities which befell Job are not represented. They are described by messenger.

But a discussion carried on by means of poetical speeches delivered in turn by different characters approaches very closely to what we understand by Drama.

Those who are familiar with Greek Tragedy will recollect that there is very little action in the earlier plays of Aeschylus. In the Book of Job we have what may fairly be called the germ of Hebrew Tragedy, though the later growth which might have been expected did not develop. Hebrew Tragedy was for some reason arrested upon the threshold of its career.

The theme of the Book of Job is the Problem of Suffering. At an earlier period the question had presented no difficulty to Hebrew thinkers. It was assumed that God always rewards the Righteous by sending them prosperity and happiness in this life, while He visits the Wicked with calamity and degradation. Prosperity is the hall-mark of Righteousness. Calamity is a proof of Sin, whether open or concealed.

The doctrine is very plainly laid down in many passages of the Psalms. It is summed up in Psalm 1, which in this respect strikes the keynote of the entire Psalter.

So long as it can be held it is complete, and satisfying in its simplicity. But upon close examination it breaks down. It does not fit the facts of life.

The Righteous *are* sometimes forsaken and their seed compelled to beg their bread. The ungodly *do*

flourish like a green bay tree, and die in the odour of prosperity and peace.

The author of Job has perceived this, and is keenly conscious of the moral problem which arises from it. He takes a traditional story as a peg upon which to hang his own ideas.

Job was a man upon whom exceptionally heavy calamities came. Accordingly, to the conventional view this meant that he had been an exceptional sinner. This is the opinion of his friends. His character had stood high in the eyes of the world, but that merely meant that he had added hypocrisy to his other vices.

Because he is an exceptional sufferer he must have been an exceptional sinner, and the only course now open to him is to acknowledge his guilt.

This he refuses to do. He knows that his conscience is clear, and he will not go behind its testimony. Nor will he adopt the alternative of cursing God and dying. He does not know why he should suffer as he does. He can only be sure that he is not a sinner, and that God is just. These are his two anchors, from which he cannot be dragged. One by one he demolishes the conventional arguments brought forward by his friends. Their speeches grow shorter and shorter, until finally they are silenced altogether.

Then, after the interpolated speech of Elihu, the discussion is closed by the Answer of God out of the whirlwind.

To modern readers this is the least satisfactory portion of the book. It merely dwells upon God's overwhelming power, manifested in the visible wonders of the created order, and upon the presumption of any

questioning by men of anything which He may be pleased to do.

Job admits that he is crushed by it—*I know that Thou canst do everything—wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*[1]

To an Oriental mind, whose conception of power is irresponsible autocracy, the assertion of God's unlimited sovereignty may be a solution of all moral problems. But to us it is no answer at all. We cannot think of God as an Irresponsible Despot. Our fuller knowledge, which was not accessible to the writers of the Old Testament, has shewn us that God, because He is God, must be bound by the laws of His own making. He cannot act in arbitrary fashion. He cannot violate the absolute Justice which is one of His Eternal Attributes. We cannot presume to fathom His Purposes completely. But we know that *He cannot deny Himself*, and therefore cannot outrage the moral sense which He has bestowed upon us.

Accordingly the contribution made by the Book of Job to the Problem of Suffering is mainly negative. He shews conclusively that the old theory is too small, and does not fit the facts. But further than this the author cannot go.

He does touch upon the idea[2] that suffering in this life may be probation for life in the world to come. But his conception of life beyond the grave is too shadowy for him to make as much of this thought as we can.

The famous passage—*I know that my Redeemer liveth*[3]—has in reality less bearing upon any conception of life after death than it appears to possess when

[1] Ch. 42. vv. 2 and 6.

[2] Chiefly in the speeches of Elihu.

[3] Ch. 19. vv. 25-27.

the translation of the Authorized English Version is read in the light of Christian ideas.

Perhaps the most striking portion of the whole book is the prologue. By his question—*Doth Job fear God for nought?*[1]—*Satan* (the use of the word is in itself a proof of late date) delivers a very subtle attack upon the Character of God. He implies that God is incapable of winning the love of His creatures for what He is. All that He can wring from them is a selfish regard, arising from the material benefits which He can withhold or bestow. The point raised affects our whole conception of God, and of our own relationship to Him.

Are we His children bound to Him by love of His Goodness? Or are we merely His pensioners who are grateful to Him only as long as He uses His Power to meet our wishes?

It is necessary to say plainly that the prologue is in no sense of the word historical. It is as entirely imaginary as are the conversations in Heaven related in Milton's *Paradise Lost.* But I have encountered people who held that because it is in the Bible it must be a description of a scene which actually occurred. They have then proceeded to argue that as God allowed an innocent man to be severely afflicted, as an experiment to see what would happen, He must be a capricious and cruel Being quite unworthy of our worship.

St. Jerome has told us that he found the Book of Job very difficult to understand, and there are probably few English readers of the Bible who have not felt the same.

[1] Ch. 1. v. 9.

The style and language are obscure, particularly in the speeches of Elihu, and there are many phrases whose exact meaning we cannot determine.

But the general purpose of the book is clear. It is, as has been said above, an attempt to solve the Problem of Suffering. It is not completely successful, and on the positive side the author's conclusions fall short of those which we can reach now.

But he rendered a real service to religion. He shewed that the old, comfortable, conventional theory cannot stand. Tried by experience it proves too small. He could not put anything very definite in its place, but he cleared a space upon which others might be able to build.

The question of Suffering must always present difficulties. Why do some people have to bear so much whilst others seem to escape it almost entirely?[1] We can give no completely satisfactory answer to this question. But we only increase our difficulties if we insist upon regarding all Suffering as Punishment for wrong done. This view is still taken by many people. But the Book of Job shewed conclusively more than two thousand years ago that if true in particular cases it is not the whole truth.

The nature of the contents of the Book of Proverbs is sufficiently indicated by its title. It is a collection of sayings avowedly drawn from different sources.

[1] The theory of re-incarnation, namely, the belief that we live a number of lives upon earth, seems to have been invented to provide an explanation. It is becoming popular in England now. But as it diminishes enormously, if it does not destroy outright, the moral significance of the life which we are leading at this moment, it is not Christian.

It is possible that some of them are as ancient as the time of Solomon himself. But any proverbial saying of unknown antiquity would be likely to be fathered by later generations upon the King who was in Jewish eyes the very embodiment of inspired profundity.

The first chapter is headed *The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David King of Israel.* Then follow nine chapters in praise of *Wisdom.* But the word is not used quite in the sense with which we are familiar. To us *wisdom* is a general term, and implies principally the outcome of experience. It is hardly possible for a very young person to be *wise*, simply because he has not lived long enough. Anyone may become *wise* in time by the mere process of living.

But the Jews did not treat *wisdom* as an almost inevitable accretion. In their eyes it is primarily a Divine gift. It is a species of inspiration, and therefore cannot be separated from moral rectitude. It is a reward of Righteousness, and as such is beyond the reach of the ungodly. They would have regarded a *wise sinner* as an impossible conception.

The point is interesting as an illustration of the Jewish power of seeing everything in its relation to God. He is Morally Perfect, and therefore no gift which man can possess can be dissociated from His Character and from the moral obligation which His Perfection lays upon us.

Sometimes *Wisdom* is almost personified, and is treated as a Being with gifts to bestow.[1] This line of thought is further developed in the Apocrypha, and in other writings which are not included in the Bible. In Christian eyes it is important as being part of the

[1] Chs. 8 and 9.

preparation of the world for the doctrine of a Personal Holy Spirit.

Chapter 10 is headed *The Proverbs of Solomon*, and introduces twenty chapters of moral precepts and warnings of various kinds.

Chapter 30 is headed—*The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal.* We have no further knowledge of any of these persons.

Chapter 31, which closes with the panegyric of *The Virtuous Woman*, is stated to have been taught to *King Lemuel* by his mother.

We are not in a position to check the statement, nor have we any means of fixing the date or nationality of Lemuel or the position of his kingdom.

In this book we have a collection of shrewd and pious maxims drawn from unknown sources and arranged by an unknown hand. The Book of Proverbs represents an Oriental and not distinctively Hebrew type of literature, of which the only European exponents hitherto have been amongst the Greeks.[1]

Ecclesiastes is anonymous. The word is the Greek translation of the Hebrew title, and means *The Preacher*. The author describes himself as *The Preacher*, and says that he was *the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*

This impersonation of Solomon was not meant to be taken literally. The author did not imagine, any more than did the author of The Wisdom of Solomon, that anybody would think that his book was in reality by Solomon's own hand. By posing as Solomon he

[1] *E.g.* Hesiod, Theognis, Solon, etc.

was merely following what had become a literary convention.

The best description of the book would be *A Sermon upon the Vanity of Human Wishes.* The author's point is to shew the hollow and unsatisfying character of the ordinary objects of human ambition. He may have been prompted to write it by meditation upon the story of Solomon's life, and he felt that his argument would be rendered more effective by being put into the mouth of the King who had provided him with his text by tasting every form of luxury which wisdom could devise and wealth and power furnish.

*Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not mine heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour; and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.*[1]

The book is one of the latest in the Old Testament, and is perhaps the work of a Jew of *The Dispersion:* that is to say, of a member of one of the Jewish colonies which were formed in various parts of the world from the sixth century B.C. onwards. The tone is decidedly pessimistic, and at times the author seems to be upon the point of lapsing into almost complete agnosticism. He has much less sense of the Presence of a Personal God than is usual in the Old Testament. In his eyes the world is in the grip of inexorable Fate, which grinds on slowly to its predestined conclusion. When the wheel has com-

[1] Ch. 2. vv. 10 and 11.

pleted its circuit it swings through the same round again.

*The thing which hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.*[1]

Towards the close of the book a more religious note is struck—*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.*[2]

But the motive for doing so does not seem to be either love or thankfulness. It is to our interest not to leave God out of account, as to remember Him is the way to make the best of the sorry business of living!

The verses which follow are obscure to English readers. They are a picturesque, metaphorical description of Old Age. They dwell entirely upon the failure of the physical powers, and give no hint that character may grow in strength and beauty up to the very end.

The last six verses of Chapter 12 appear to be the work of a later editor. He seems to have felt that the general tone of the book is discouraging, if not definitely irreligious, and that it was therefore necessary to emphasize the moral to which it points —*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*[3]

If this is not *The Preacher's* own conclusion it is the natural comment of a more religious mind upon his view of life.

The Book of Daniel stands by itself. It is unique as being the only example in the Old Testament of

[1] Ch. 1. v. 9. [2] Ch. 12. v. 1. [3] Ch. 12. v. 13.

the class of literature called *Apocalyptic*. *Apocalypse* is the Greek equivalent for the Latin word *Revelation*, which has been adopted into English.

*Apocalyptic* literature is so called because it deals with Visions or Revelations which are displayed before the eyes of the writer, and may be regarded as the offspring of Prophecy.

It appears first when Prophecy proper is upon the wane, and when Prophecy ceased it filled the vacant place. It served much the same purpose, and helped to keep Faith and Hope alive in time of trouble. It was extensively practised during the three centuries before the Christian era, and lingered for the best part of a century afterwards. But the Jews never regarded it as standing upon the same level as Prophecy, and admitted very little of it into the Bible. The Book of Enoch,[1] a work which has much in common with the latter part of Daniel, very nearly found a place in the Old Testament, but did not quite do so.

(The Revelation of St. John was at one time nearly excluded from the New.)

Apocalyptic writing is generally somewhat obscure to modern readers. This obscurity is doubtless to some extent intentional. The times were times of trouble, often of downright persecution. A writer who wished to assure his fellow-sufferers that the tyranny under which they laboured would only be for a time, and that God would vindicate His Saints with power and great glory, could not venture to say so quite openly. It was expedient for him to write in such a way that if a copy of his book should happen

[1] Quoted in Jude, vv. 14 and 15.

to fall into the tyrant's hands no serious mischief should ensue.

It would be out of place to attempt to discuss here the psychology of Visions. Probably that could only be done satisfactorily by one who has seen Visions himself. Two points are, however, obvious.

1. If men endeavour to see Visions, or profess to have seen them, we must face the possibility of unconscious self-deception, or of deliberate fraud,[1] when they record their experiences.

2. While many reputed visions can be dismissed upon one or other of the foregoing grounds there is a residue which must be taken seriously. This residue is not, perhaps, entirely confined to the Bible.

Like Esther, Daniel existed in two versions. There was a Greek version which contained certain additions to the Hebrew. The Hebrew version is what has been placed by us in the Old Testament. The Greek additions are to be found in the Apocrypha under the titles—*The Song of the Three Holy Children*, *The History of Susanna*, and *The History of the Destruction of Bel and The Dragon.*

The latter part of the first of these is used by the Church of England as an alternative canticle to the *Te Deum* at Morning Prayer.

The existence of different versions is due to the Jewish colony in Egypt. Soon after the foundation of Alexandria in 322 B.C. a large number of Jews made it their home. It was a Greek-speaking city, and they habitually spoke Greek, until in time they

[1] This may be why the Jews were not very willing to include apocalyptic writings in the Bible. They seem to have regarded them with a certain amount of mistrust.

forgot their native language. A Greek translation of the Old Testament was made for their benefit, and additions to Esther and Daniel which were not recognized in Palestine made their way into it.

The point is of interest, as illustrating the fact that at one time the distinction between Inspired Scripture and other writings was not drawn as sharply as we draw it now. The decision was reached gradually, and not without some divergence of opinion. It shews us what may be called The Bible in the Making.

As it stands now, the Book of Daniel falls into two well-marked divisions.

The first six chapters record the adventures of certain Jews of the Captivity of Babylon. Daniel is the principal character, and the stories of the Golden Image and the Lion's Den are as well known as any in the Bible. Daniel has become to us a type of piety, courage and endurance.

Chapter 6 ends with the words—*So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

Our only other knowledge of Daniel is derived from Ezekiel. In Ezekiel xiv. 14 he is classed with Noah and Job as a type of righteousness. That passage was written in or about the year 591. If Daniel was by that time sufficiently well known to be quoted as an example he must have reached extreme old age when Cyrus became King of Babylon fifty-three years later. It is hard to see how he can have *prospered* much during Cyrus' reign.

It is also unlikely, albeit not quite impossible, that Ezekiel should bracket a younger contemporary of his own with Noah and with Job.

Noah and Job were traditional figures belonging to the remote past, and it is natural to assume that Daniel was such another, though no record of his history has come down to us.

It is therefore difficult to hold that the historical Daniel (whoever he may have been) has any real connection with the book which bears his name.

We have noticed already the way in which Jewish authors would ascribe their books to the Heroes of the Past, and it is probable that Daniel's name is used here as those of David and Solomon are used elsewhere.

The incidents described may well have a foundation in fact, but it is unlikely that the narrative is contemporary. It seems to have been written to inspire courage and patience in some time of stress, and should therefore be regarded as a sermon rather than as a history. The author's method is the one which seems natural to an Oriental. He tells a story to bring out his point. He selects the Babylonish Captivity as being the most severe affliction through which the nation had ever passed, and proceeds to shew how an ideal Jew would bear himself under such conditions. Nebuchadnezzar proves powerless against him, and the pride of the Great King is visited with an awful judgment.

The moral of the first six chapters is summed up in the words—*The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.*[1]

The last six chapters profess to belong to the same period. But they cannot have been written before the year 186 B.C. They may well be by more than one hand.

[1] Ch. 4. v. 25.

They refer to the tribulations undergone by the Jews at the hands of Antiochus Epiphanes. The Powers of the world are seen as animals at war with one another, as we are accustomed to see them represented in the political cartoon. They are invested with every attribute of ruthless ferocity which imagination can suggest. But however terrible they may appear to be now, they are destined to give way to *the kingdom of the Saints of the Most High.*

The value of the picture is increased when we recollect that the Lion, the Eagle, and the Bear are still the recognized badges of the most powerful nations of the world, and that the course of history has repeatedly justified the selection.

The entirely human principles of Justice and Mercy, which seem to be beyond the comprehension of animals, have never yet been the only foundation of any State. The visions of Daniel still hold before the eyes of the world an ideal which has never yet been realized. Justice and Mercy count for more now than they have ever done before. We look for the day when they will be absolutely supreme. But it has not dawned yet.

A peculiar feature of these chapters is the belief in Guardian Angels of Nations—*The Prince of Persia* and *The Prince of Grecia,*[1] who are the champions of their people in war.

The book contains an expression of belief in a resurrection more definite than is usual in the Old Testament; and, it should be noted, in a resurrection not confined to the Righteous—*And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to*

[1] Ch. 10. v. 20.

*everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*[1]

The permanent value of the Book of Daniel lies in the fact that it was written to inspire Faith, Hope, and Courage in times of trouble. As long as wars and rumours of wars persist, as long as the last word appears to rest with any form of violence or oppression, it will never become obsolete. But in modern times its true character has been submerged by a curious cult of Daniel the Prophet. He is widely regarded as being the Prophet who, more than any other, foresaw our own time, and attempts are made to ascertain its immediate future by reference to his writings.

I do not know whether this cult (which applies also to the Revelation of St. John) can be traced before the Napoleonic wars; but it existed then, and has been revived during the last three years.

During the latter part of 1914 I received a considerable number of confident forecasts of the course which the war would take, and of the date upon which it would end, derived from the Book of Daniel. Some of them were exceedingly ingenious, but they have all been falsified by events.

It is to be hoped that the practice of trying to divine the future in this fashion will now be abandoned. It cannot be successful, and if it could succeed would be of no advantage to anybody.

We shall find the Book of Daniel more profitable reading if we content ourselves with trying to gather from it the lessons which the author intended it to teach.

[1] Ch. 12. v. 2.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

We have now completed a short general survey of the contents of the Old Testament.

We have seen that it is not a single production of uniform character, but a gradual growth of a very varied kind. It includes examples of almost every kind of writing. It contains poetry and prose, history and legend, myth, allegory, and sermons.

It is therefore a richer record of spiritual experience than it could be if it were nothing but a recital of bare facts. It has grown with the life of a highly imaginative people, whose circumstances and outlook were very unlike our own. It shews us how they could press material of various kinds into the service of religion.

It reflects traditional beliefs which they shared with other nations of the same original stock. It shews us what they knew of their own early history. It records their hopes and fears, their successes and failures. In the form in which we possess it now, it has passed through many editorial hands. It is a selection from a larger body of literature of which a large part does not now survive.

In several cases independent compositions have been combined by the editors into a single "book."

We do not know exactly when or by whom the process of editing and collecting was carried out, but it appears to have been begun about the middle of the fifth century B.C. It was virtually completed about two hundred years later. It is possible that when the work was begun some of the earlier documents, such as The Book of Jasher or The Book of the Wars of the Lord, had already disappeared. It is not unlikely that some things perished at the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and that the older parts of our Bible represent all that the Jews who returned after the Exile had kept with them, or were able to find.

It might be interesting if more had survived. But we cannot doubt that what God has permitted to come down to us is as much as we have any need to know.

As the collection grew it came to be regarded with a high and increasing degree of reverence. The Jewish Church came to feel that these writings were unique. They spoke of God in a way in which no others did, and their contents shewed that the authors must have lived exceptionally close to Him.

Thus the whole collection came to constitute a Religious Authority of exceptional value behind which it was impossible to go. This has been recognized by saying that it is *Inspired*, or that it is *The Word of God*.

Such a decision could not be reached in a moment. It could only rest upon a general *consensus* of opinion tested by experience. At one time there was naturally some uncertainty as to exactly what writings were to be included in the sacred list. Palestine and Egypt held slightly different opinions. But eventually a dividing line was drawn, and the deciding

factor was Experience. Some books were found to be of such high religious value that their Inspiration could not be doubted. Others failed to pass the test, and were therefore placed in an inferior category. Thus a final and authoritative Canon of Scripture was formed, which was adopted *en bloc* as a matter of course by the Christian Church. It would not have occurred to any of the first Christians to question the decision of the Jewish Church in the matter, and we have no ground for wishing to do so now.

It can only be challenged by people who find that the Old Testament does not conform to their idea of what Inspired Writing ought to be. But when this objection is raised we are entitled to ask—" Upon what does your conception of Inspiration rest? What warrant have you for assuming that it ought to produce results other than those which we find in the pages of the Bible? " It is fashionable now to disparage Authority, especially in religious matters. It is often assumed that in religion Authority and Experience are at war, and that Experience is necessarily always right and that Authority is necessarily always wrong.

This notion is partly due to a genuine desire for sincerity. But it is worth while to point out that Authority is always the product of Experience, and that it is the only means by which past experience can be preserved for the benefit of future generations.

It has seldom if ever happened that a rule of general application has been made arbitrarily. Men decide that something is to be so, because their Experience has led them to think that it will prove advantageous.

Subsequent events may prove them to have been

mistaken, and we may be compelled to reverse their decision. Or a wider and longer experience may enable us to amplify it. But it is always to be remembered that any authoritative pronouncement, whether it concern the Beliefs of a Church or the Civil Law of a State, has behind it a body of experience of some kind. If we are disposed to question it we must do our best to ensure that we really understand the experience upon which it rests. It must always be doubtful how far we can understand an experience which we have not actually shared.

Now the Jewish Church and Nation are indistinguishable. They are and have always been one, as no Christian Church and Nation have ever been. And there is admittedly no parallel with the history of the Jews to be found elsewhere. Our own history has been entirely different. We cannot pretend that we have shared their national experience.

The Jews are a unique people. They have successfully resisted all efforts to exterminate them, and have played a part in the history of the world entirely out of proportion to their numbers. This fact must be recognized by anyone who has the least knowledge of their history, whatever may be the explanation of it which he may feel inclined to give.

At a comparatively late period in their chequered career, after they had lost all political independence, and not much more than three centuries before they ceased to have any city or country which they could call their own, the Jewish Church came to regard the books which now constitute our Old Testament as *Inspired.*

It may be impossible for us to define exactly the

grounds upon which the decision was based. Possibly the authors of it could not have done so. The fact which most concerns us now is that it was reached. The Jews have adhered to it ever since, and their judgment has been endorsed by the Christian Church. After a time the Church came to regard another body of writings as equally inspired, and as of equal authority in all respects. But the addition of the New Testament to the Scriptures was never intended to abolish the Old.

There are only two grounds upon which the united decision of the Jewish and Christian Churches could be challenged now.

1. We might assert that there is no God, or that He has never spoken to men. If so, there never have been, and never can be, any writings which deserve to be called *Inspired.*

The former view has never commanded a following of any importance. A real atheist is as rare and as abnormal as a man who is totally colour-blind.

But the latter had many adherents in England during the eighteenth century, and seems to be raising its head again now.

The theory that God, though undoubtedly existent, had never said or done anything since the creation of the world seems to have been in the eighteenth century the outcome of political conditions.

Everybody was agreed that there must, as a matter of course, be a King. But most people were equally agreed that he must as a matter of course do nothing. It is not, therefore, unnatural to regard God in the same way.

The revival of the view nowadays is probably due

to different causes. It seems to spring from the feeling that the actual course of the world is not in harmony with anything which Conscience permits us to regard as a Divine Will, coupled with failure to recognize the Christian doctrine that the Divine Purpose may be thwarted by the Free Will which God has bestowed upon men.

A genuine, but unduly limited, reverence seems to forbid us to say that God is not always successful. Therefore many people fall back upon the idea that He does not try.

But it is always dangerous to assert what is called "a general negative" in any sphere. That is to say, we are on very uncertain ground if we declare that something never can have happened because it lies outside our own personal experience.

The most which can be asserted positively by anyone who wishes to deny the possibility of any intercourse between God and man is—*God has never spoken to me.*

If a man makes such a declaration we are bound to take his word for it, however incredible it may appear.

But if he proceeds to argue—*Therefore He can never have spoken to anyone else*, he is making his own personal experience the sole test of all possibility. This test we must decline to accept as final. Against his individual opinion we can set other opinions of at least equal weight which have been endorsed by the collective judgment of the Jewish and Christian Churches. When we have done so the scale inclines heavily to the Christian side.

Absolute proof is admittedly impossible. But no scientific thinker can doubt which view has the stronger claim upon him.

2. We may assert that although God might inspire men, He cannot have inspired the writers of the Old Testament, because it is unworthy of Him.

This view has been brought forward in the Church from time to time, and those who hold it now are probably unaware that it is not new.

Very often it springs from a confusion of thought which does not recognize that the Old Testament is not upon the same level as the New. There might be difficulties in the way of regarding it as God's *final* word to mankind. But the Christian has never viewed it in this light.

We have always treated it as a preparation for something higher, which we believe to have been revealed to us in the Life of Christ.

The fact that Old Testament ethics are nowhere Christian ought not to be a difficulty to anyone who does not insist upon reading the books in precisely the way in which the Church considers that they should not be read. We only acquire the proper perspective when we treat the Old Testament as an introduction to the New.

But there are some people who maintain that even from the Christian point of view the Old Testament cannot be revered as sacred.

They consider that what seems to them to be little more than a record of crude beliefs and savage practices cannot reflect in the least degree any part of the Mind and Will of God.[1]

[1] Whenever I have encountered this view I have always found it accompanied by very slight knowledge of the actual contents of the books in question. The people who read the Bible most do not, as a rule, feel tempted to disparage it.

The Christian answer to this objection is that the Saviour of the World thought otherwise. But to those who feel unable to accept this answer as final, it must be pointed out that their objection only becomes serious if they can maintain that they have some private knowledge of God which is not accessible to ordinary people.

Before we can say—*This cannot be a revelation of God*, we must assume that our knowledge of Him is singularly complete. We ought to be prepared to give some information as to the sources from which it is derived. It is open to anyone to say that neither the Old Testament nor the New is what he would have expected Inspired Writings to be. We may very fairly maintain that the picture of God with which they present us is unlike any which we could have drawn for ourselves. But we cannot upon that ground deny that it is (or at least may be) the most complete and accurate picture upon which human eyes can look.

We can only deny the Inspiration of any part of the Bible if we are quite sure that we know that Inspired Writing *must* be something utterly different. And if we are prepared to maintain that, we must be able to point to some other record whose genuine Inspiration we are ready to recognize. Otherwise our standard is merely personal, arbitrary opinion.

As far as I know there have only been three men of any importance since the last of those who had seen the Lord who have professed to be the mouthpiece of a new and nobler revelation of God.

They have been Mahomet in the seventh century, the American John Smith, founder of the Mormons,

in the middle of the nineteenth century, and the German philosopher Nietzsche in our own day. Each of these teachers gained a large number of adherents with remarkable rapidity, and is a force in the world to-day.

They must submit to the test (which they would not in all probability wish to decline)—*By their fruits ye shall know them.*

On the one side we have the Christian Church. Upon the other, without delving further into the past, recent events in Armenia and Belgium, and the history of Salt Lake City.

We know that the Church has had a chequered history. Its own sons are the last who wish to deny any of its sins or blunders. But it is for the conscience of the world to say whether the Christian Church or the Mormon Community of Utah has done most for the benefit of mankind; and whether the *patience of the saints* of all ages and countries, of whom the world was not worthy, is or is not a more faithful mirror of the Mind of the Eternal Father than the latest exploits of the German and Turkish armies.

It has been pointed out that the Jews recognized different degrees of Inspiration within the Canon. *The Writings* formed part of Scriptures, but did not rank with *The Law* or *The Prophets.* They were inspired, but stood upon a lower level.

The Church has drawn a similar distinction in the case of The Apocrypha. The books of the Apocrypha are part of the Bible, and in the authorized phrase of the Church of England are read *for example of life and instruction of manners.*[1] But they do not rank with

[1] Article VI.

the Old Testament. Their inspiration is considered to be of a lower order. But in England the distinction has become virtually a dead letter. Our practice of printing the Bible in incomplete form has caused the very existence of the *other books* to become almost unknown to a large majority of Church-goers. Their contents are quite unknown to vast numbers of our congregations.

And ignorance of the fact that the Church recognizes different degrees of Inspiration has undoubtedly encouraged the formation of unduly rigid ideas as to what Inspiration must mean.

It is impossible to define Inspiration exactly, just as it would be impossible to frame a complete and exact definition of Genius. It is something which can be recognized where it exists, though it can seldom win recognition without a struggle.

I do not know what argument could be brought forward to convince a man who denied that Pheidias was a great sculptor, or Shakespeare a great poet, or Raphael a great painter. We could not do more than say—"The judgment of generations of competent critics is against you. If you are not prepared to accept their verdict, the best thing for you to do is to devote some years to the study of Sculpture, Poetry, and Painting. You may then become able to appreciate the works in which you now see no particular merit. If at the end of that time you are still of your present opinion we can only say that we are sorry for you."

But if we cannot say exactly what Inspiration is, we can say that careful study of the Bible has shewn us that an Inspired Narrative is not necessarily

merely a record of literal fact. It may contain much literal fact; but it also contains much which is not fact, and was never meant to be treated as if it were.

At first this may seem to detract largely from its value. There are many people who would hold that if the Old Testament contain statements which are not facts it is not *true*. And if it be not *true* it is not worth reading, and the entire fabric of the Christian religion comes to the ground.

But the religious value of the Old Testament as we understand it now is in reality higher than ever before. It can touch our lives now with a directness which it could not possess under the old conditions. For if it is to be read only and entirely as a record of literal fact the Hebrews might as well have lived upon another planet.

The difficulty which we experience in determining what is the Will of God in any given instance did not exist for them. His Will was not only made plain, it was demonstrated in such a way that they could not possibly be ignorant of it. They might elect to disregard it, but they did so with their eyes open. They had no need of the great qualities which are born of uncertainty—Faith, Courage, and Patience. They always knew what the end would be, and that it would be what they desired. It could not matter what befell a people who knew all the time, with absolute supernatural certainty, that whatever they did God would extricate them from all their difficulties, and that everything would inevitably come right at last. If that were what Inspiration meant for the Hebrews, what Inspiration for ourselves could we derive from their history to-day?

On this theory their history has no point of contact with our lives. Their world was not ours in any respect. Indeed, they can hardly be called Men and Women. They were merely puppets, swept along by a tide of Divine Power the like of which does not set in our day. If that were what it meant to be *God's Chosen*, are we not bound to give thanks that no such choice has fallen upon us?

But a reverent and careful study of the Hebrew records yields more encouraging results. It shews us a people struggling little by little with very great difficulty to a fuller knowledge of God. Their progress was not uniform, there were continual lapses of a discreditable character. But in spite of moral failures and of political catastrophes, which might well have destroyed any faith which they had ever possessed, God came to count for more and more in their eyes, and their conception of His character rose higher and higher.

At first, like other primitive peoples, they thought of Him as no more than the Champion of their own petty tribe. He was merely their Leader in war, and His Power might be judged by His Ability to give them victory over their enemies.

But from that conception, and all that necessarily goes with it, they came to think of Him as the King of the whole earth, whose attitude towards His children is one of unwearied, unchanging love.

Other nations have done great things, and have made contributions to the life of the world which the Hebrews could not have made. But no other people has made such a spiritual pilgrimage. That is where the unique value of the Old Testament lies. It is the

only record which we can ever possess of a spiritual journey to which there is no parallel elsewhere. It is that in itself, although apart from the New Testament it is incomplete. If there were no New Testament and no Christian Church, the Old Testament would be disappointing. It would be like a road which led nowhere. We should feel that there ought to be more to come. But it would still be too valuable to be ignored. There would be nothing which could take its place.

Many men have sought God diligently in many ways, and it is not for us to say that any such quest has been altogether fruitless. In some cases they have gathered disciples, and have left behind them writings of real value. But their search has always been the search of an individual, and for that reason their name has been adopted by their following. Their disciples may have continued the search, but the main part of it has fallen within the compass of a single life.

Nowhere outside the Old Testament can we find a record of a Spiritual Pilgrimage which is also the History of a Nation. Whatever the Hebrews learned about God they did not owe entirely to any one man. They had their great leaders, who in character and spiritual conception stood far above the majority of the people. But although they felt that there could be none like Moses, yet he was only one of a line which was prolonged through many centuries.

We know that there were Prophetic Schools amongst the Hebrews, which might be compared with the Philosophic Schools or Religious Orders of other countries. But they certainly did not produce the

whole of our Old Testament. It is doubtful whether they produced any part of it.

The writers of the Old Testament were not, so far as we can tell, members of any one school. They were certainly not a close caste. The only bond of union between them was that they were Hebrews. God caused them to be cast up by the nation as it went its way, according as the need for them arose.

The Old Testament is not merely the history of a Spiritual Pilgrimage; it is more than that. It is the Record of a National Life covering many centuries, told as or (if we prefer so to say) interpreted as the record of a Spiritual Pilgrimage. That is what gives it its peculiar religious value. No other National History has ever been told in the same way. Is there any other upon which the same interpretation could be put? Nowhere else can we see how religion can grow with the growth of a nation, and therefore how it can be carried into all the affairs of common life.

Most noteworthy of all is the consistent attitude of the Hebrews towards their own spiritual progress. As their knowledge of God increased they never took any credit to themselves for it. It was not a discovery of their own, but something which He was pleased to impart. Whatever they learned they owed not to their own ability, but to His Goodness.

It is natural to compare the Hebrews with the Greeks. They were two of the most gifted nations of antiquity, and have left a mark upon the modern world out of all proportion to their numbers. Between them they provided the language in which the Bible was originally written. The comparison yields few if any points of resemblance. The

difference between the two nations is wide and deep. The simplest way of measuring it is by contrasting their attitude towards their own highest achievements.

The Greeks were marvellously clever. They are still the acknowledged leaders of the world in Art, and no European thinker can afford to be ignorant of their philosophy.[1] They had unlimited confidence in their own intellectual capacity, and believed that there could be no problem which mind of man could not attack with good hope of success. For that we owe them an enormous debt.

They made many attempts to find a purely intellectual interpretation of the universe, and these culminated in the philosophy of Plotinus at Alexandria in the third century A.D.

Plotinus rises very high. He is one of the great religious thinkers of the world. But even in his hands the attempt was not successful. In him Greek philosophy shot its final bolt, and the verdict of the world has been that it missed the mark.

The Hebrews had a different centre of gravity. Not less gifted than the Greeks, they did not rate their own powers so highly. In their eyes the central problem of the universe was not Intellectual but Moral. Its solution was to be found in a moral correspondence between Man and God.

God Himself dwelt in thick darkness. It was not within human power to discover Him by any search. But little by little experience convinced them that He could be known, because He was pleased to reveal

[1] One modern school of writers, represented by Mr. G. L. Dickinson of King's College, Cambridge, considers that Greek ideals are superior to Christian ones.

Himself. When the revelation was made man was capable of recognizing it, though he could not be compelled to do so. He could not cause it to be made, but he could find in the glimpses of the Divine Character vouchsafed to him an inspiration and guide for his own life which grew stronger and clearer as time went on.

To the Greek the Art of Living meant the development of all his powers of mind and body as the means of expressing that of which he was already conscious within himself.

To the Hebrew it meant bringing himself into closer moral harmony with God; which involved the transformation of himself into something morally superior to what he was already. The Greek set more store by a nimble brain: the Hebrew by a clean heart.

Because it is Moral the Hebrew ideal possesses a power to which the intellectual brilliance of the Greeks can never attain. We admire the Greek, and study his wonderful achievements. But for the satisfaction of our deepest and most insistent needs we must turn elsewhere. Something more than cleverness is needed when our wickedness has become like a sore burden too heavy to be borne. The worship of beauty is no remedy for the plague of man's own heart. *Thou hast made us for Thyself*, wrote St. Augustine in his *Confessions*, *and our heart is restless until it rest in Thee.*

As the Hebrews came to perceive more clearly that God was revealing Himself to them they realized that He had always been doing that from the very beginning of their history. They viewed whatever they

knew of their own past in the light of this conviction. They saw that God is unchanging, and that His purpose has always been the same, though men may not always have perceived it.[1] When they called Him *The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob* it was not a mere phrase. There is a whole philosophy of history summed up in the title.

It may be urged that belief in a Divine Revelation, however sincere, is nothing but a delusion. It is merely an unscientific way of accounting for ideas which come into the mind without conscious effort on our part. If the Hebrews had been acquainted with the principles of modern psychology they would have known of the existence of *the sub-conscious mind*, and would have realized that it alone was the source of the ideas which they hastily ascribed to God.

Any formal discussion of this view would lie outside our present scope. It would involve a general argument as to the existence of God, and as to the probability or possibility of His revealing Himself to men.

But this book is not intended primarily for people who are in doubt upon these points. It is meant for Christians who believe that the Bible ought to be read, but are perplexed as to how it is to be regarded.

But one thing may be said here. If the Hebrew belief that God was revealing Himself to them, and that they had a unique National Mission to accomplish in the world, was a delusion, how did it survive so many shocks?

[1] St. Paul saw this more clearly still. But it is perceived in the Old Testament.

Attention has already been drawn to the fact that the Hebrew State was never very successful.

At one time, before they had become a nation, the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt. During their journey across the desert they were inclined to think, so servile had their spirit become, that they had paid too highly for their freedom.

The conquest of the Promised Land proved to be a task of extreme difficulty, and from time to time they were virtually enslaved by their neighbours before it was accomplished.

The Monarchy began with a short outburst of splendour, but then declined very rapidly. It split into two petty principalities which were frequently at war with one another. Both were eventually swept out of existence.

A certain number of Jews returned subsequently and rebuilt Jerusalem, but they never recovered their political independence, though they never ceased to dream of it.

By every ordinary test, by every test which anyone else in the world would have recognized then, their God failed them completely, and not once only. Yet their belief that they were His Chosen was never destroyed. A belief which persists for centuries in the face of everything best calculated to dispel it cannot be lightly dismissed as a delusion. Anything which can survive so many storms seems more likely to be founded upon rock than upon anything else. False beliefs commonly collapse when they have been belied by bitter experience.

The political failure of the Jews enhances their religious triumph. A religion which guarantees its

followers prosperity and success will never lack adherents as long as it can make its promises good. But a religion which cannot avert defeat must possess some secret spring of vitality if it is to survive.

The argument that the Jews had not succeeded was sometimes brought against Christianity in its early days. A Roman might say with perfect truth to a Christian—"Your God is admittedly only second-hand. On your own showing you borrowed Him from the Jews, and what has He been able to do for them? Rome's gods have given her the Empire of the World, and what more can be asked of any religion?"

There are probably still many people with whom this line of argument would carry weight. In most pagan eyes it would be entirely convincing.

But the Jews taught the world (we may almost say in spite of themselves) a lesson which the Christian Church has been very slow to learn. They showed that religion is not a means of ensuring worldly success. They proved that it is not bound up with political conditions. It is something which can flourish under any circumstances. Prosperity cannot ensure it (even Solomon fell away in his old age) and disaster cannot extinguish it.

In other words—the history of the Jews proves what the Old Testament continually asserts—that Spiritual Values are the only real ones. They survive, whatever else may go down in ruins.

And when we reflect that the Jews had not received a Revelation of God as full as that which has been granted to us, and that they had little hope of any life beyond the grave to sustain them in time of trouble,

we can begin to appreciate the wonderful nature of their achievement.

Their achievement is so wonderful when we consider it carefully in its proper perspective that it seems to be more difficult to ascribe it to their own genius than to accept their own view that they were Inspired from on High. The facts of history cannot be explained away. The Bible has been written. We have to account for it as best we can. And the Jews' own theory, that God revealed Himself to them, seems, whatever difficulties it may present, to be more adequate and easier of belief than any other which we can frame. If it were not their own theory, should we not have found ourselves compelled to postulate something not unlike it as the best means of accounting for what would otherwise defy explanation?

The Old Testament is neither the most ancient nor the most extensive of the Sacred Literatures of the world, and this fact may seem to militate against the unique position which the Church has assigned to it.

But neither antiquity or volume can be made the sole criterion of value. No one would deny that the artistic products of Athenian civilization during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. have never been surpassed. But Athens was a very small place; its civilization was by no means the oldest in the world, and the fifth and fourth centuries were not the beginning of its history.

There is *a priori* no reason for assuming that the Sacred Literature of a small people like the Jews, produced at a comparatively recent period, approximately between 850 and 150 B.C., is necessarily inferior to the older productions of larger nations.

The question must be decided upon its own merits. As the Christian Church owes its existence to the Jewish Church, no one who is accustomed to say—*I believe in the Holy Catholic Church*, will entertain any doubt as to the unique importance of the Hebrew Scriptures. And it is hardly worth while to argue about the merits of any part of the Bible with those who do not share the faith to which it belongs. Their ideals are different, and it is therefore not surprising that in their eyes Indian or Chinese writings should seem superior. People who do not share our view of the Person of Christ are unlikely to see much in the early history of the aspirations which culminated in Him.

The foregoing pages contain nothing with which scholars are not already familiar.

But to a large number of English Church-people they may be of the nature of an unwelcome surprise. They may be new, and new ideas of any kind are apt to be unsettling. Few people like to be unsettled; and we dislike it most of all where our religion is concerned, because an unsettlement there tends to make us feel that we have been deprived of the only stability remaining in the world.

We may be ready to change our political and social ideas because we see that changed circumstances demand it. But if what we have believed about our religion is not to remain the same for ever, have we any safe anchorage anywhere at all?

It may, however, be good for us to be unsettled from time to time. Stolid acquiescence in familiar views is very comfortable, because it makes no mental nor moral demands upon us. But it is not Faith, and

is the worst enemy of Spiritual Growth. It has never been described better than in the words of Zephaniah —*And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil.*[1] That is to say, Nothing can happen. Everything must go on the same for evermore.

Such an attitude may succeed in staving off any new ideas for a time. But if it become general and be maintained for any considerable period, it must lead to violent revolution. If we insist now on reading the Bible exactly as our great-grandfathers read it, it is very unlikely that our grand-children will read it at all.

If we decline to take account of the outcome of all the study which has been devoted to it during the last half-century, we are doing all that lies in us to discredit it entirely in the eyes of our descendants. We may not succeed, it may be saved by its inherent power. But we shall have done our best.

If we say that the Old Testament is not so ancient as was once supposed, that we do not know by whom the greater part of it was written, that it contains a large admixture of Poetry, Myth and Legend, and that it was edited by unknown hands between the years 450 and 150 B.C., we may seem to be disparaging its authority, and to be striking a blow at the very foundations of the Christian Religion. Such charges have been brought against many students of the Bible before now, and they will in all probability be brought again.

[1] Ch. I. v. 12.

But if we value the Bible at all, we must value it for what it really is, not for what we may have believed it to be. If it be in truth *The Word of God*, no opinion about its origin which we may entertain can enhance its value, and nothing which we can discover about it can shake its authority. The *Word of God* is none the less the *Word of God* if it prove not to have been spoken in the way which men once imagined.

Some religious writers are fond of drawing a sharp distinction between *Scholars* and *Simple People*. It is true that *Scholars* do differ both in their tastes and occupations from those who have not much learning. It is therefore natural that their views on many questions should differ from the views of those who have never made such questions an object of special study.

But the distinction is sometimes drawn in an exceedingly mischievous fashion. It is hinted, if not affirmed outright, that *Scholars* are a malignant crew whose object is to perplex and disturb mankind. Having no faith in themselves, and having transferred the adoration due to God from Him to their own intellectual powers, their purpose is to destroy faith wherever they can find it.

It is difficult to judge how widespread this temper is. But it certainly exists, and appears to be upon the increase. If it become general, it will lead to a duel between the Church and *the intellectuals* such as has worked havoc in more than one Continental country. Hitherto we have avoided that in England. The peculiar strength of the Church of England, which entitles us to entertain the highest hopes for the future, is that we have never yet declared war upon the Intellect.

We regard the Intellect as a principal sphere of the Operation of the Holy Spirit. We have refused to recognize any antithesis between Faith and Reason. We have always maintained that Ignorance is the most dangerous enemy of Religion.

It is not meant that every new theory is to be accepted without question simply because it is new, nor that there is no such thing as *the faith which was once delivered to the saints.*[1] But many beliefs have become current in the Church from time to time which no stretch of imagination can regard as part of that divine deposit.

If *simple faith* be understood to mean a determination to believe what is not true because it is familiar, the less we have of it the better. If, where the Bible is concerned, it can only be maintained by ignoring the labours of two generations of scholars, it is difficult to see what else we are to understand by it.

The view that because the Bible is inspired it can be nothing but a record of facts possessed the advantage of being easy to teach and easy to learn. Falsehood is generally easier of acceptance than Truth, because it is smaller and simpler. Falsehood, particularly when it is the outcome of honest error, is what has already commended itself to some man's mind as probable. And what has appealed naturally to one man, and appears convincing in his eyes, is likely to appear equally convincing in the eyes of others. Truth is often at first sight extremely improbable. And the larger the subject under consideration, the more difficult and improbable is the truth about it likely to prove.

[1] Jude, v. 3.

Given a collection of Divinely Inspired Writings, it is likely that mistaken ideas will become current about them, because they belong to a region above that in which we are accustomed to move and have our being. The probability of such mistakes is immensely increased if centuries afterwards the books are translated into another language for the benefit of another race.

The truth as to their origin, the nature of their inspiration, and in many passages as to their meaning, is not likely to be apparent on the surface. We should naturally expect its discovery to demand careful and patient study. And when a mistaken view has been current for a century or two, there are many immediate practical advantages in continuing to teach it.

Most people are fiercely conservative in religious matters, and a teacher who breaks with the tradition to which his followers are accustomed is likely to imperil his own influence for the time being.

But if Clergy and other Religious Teachers in England now are not prepared to take this risk, it means that they prefer Expediency to Truth, and have lowered themselves to the level of a Political Caucus. A Church which sinks to that might be an extremely effective organization for many purposes, and might still have a considerable lease of life before it. But as a Church it would have become worthless, and its final disappearance from the earth would be a matter for thanksgiving. Meanwhile it would be bound, for the sake of elementary decency, to cease from praying twice daily that God may grant us in this world *knowledge of His Truth.*

The Church of England has, I believe, made a very honest and persistent effort to act up to that Prayer. As part of this endeavour it has urged the study of the Bible upon all its sons and daughters. But now there seems to be real danger lest many of them should shrink from the results of that policy and should refuse to admit that there can be more to be learned about the Bible than is already a matter of common knowledge. Such timidity must in the long run sap the very foundations of Religion.

For my own part I am firmly convinced that anyone who studies the Bible with reverent care will always find that the more he can learn about it, the more he can learn from it. Anything which we can learn about its History, the Nature of its Inspiration, and the Methods of its Writers, is so much more light thrown upon its contents. If in the Bible we possess a treasure of Divine origin, any light which can be thrown upon it must help us to appreciate its Excellence more fully.

In conclusion, I would say once more that I believe that the Old Testament is rightly described as *The Word of God*. I believe it to be of unique value, and to possess a claim to the title *Inspired* which is shared by no other writings in the world except the New Testament. I have no desire to explain it away, or to reduce the history of the Hebrews to a commonplace and trivial story.

But I believe that respect for its authority has led to the formation of opinions about it which careful examination of the books does not warrant. These opinions have placed it in a false position, and have thereby diminished its real value. If they persist,

there must soon be a reaction from them of a shattering and disastrous kind.

By trying to make it into a guide of one kind we have missed much of what it really has to teach. It simply cannot be forced into the little mould which we had prepared for it.

Our need is to ask the help of the Holy Spirit to enable us to put away our own ideas about it, and to read it as it was meant to be read. Then we shall see more clearly than ever before how it did in truth prepare the way for the Coming of Christ, and shall be led to a deeper thankfulness to God for His Goodness, and to a fuller understanding of the wonderful way in which He has dealt with men.

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